

From Circles to the Party

**The Tasks of Communists
Outside the Existing Parties**



Pacific Collective (Marxist-Leninist)

#52,760

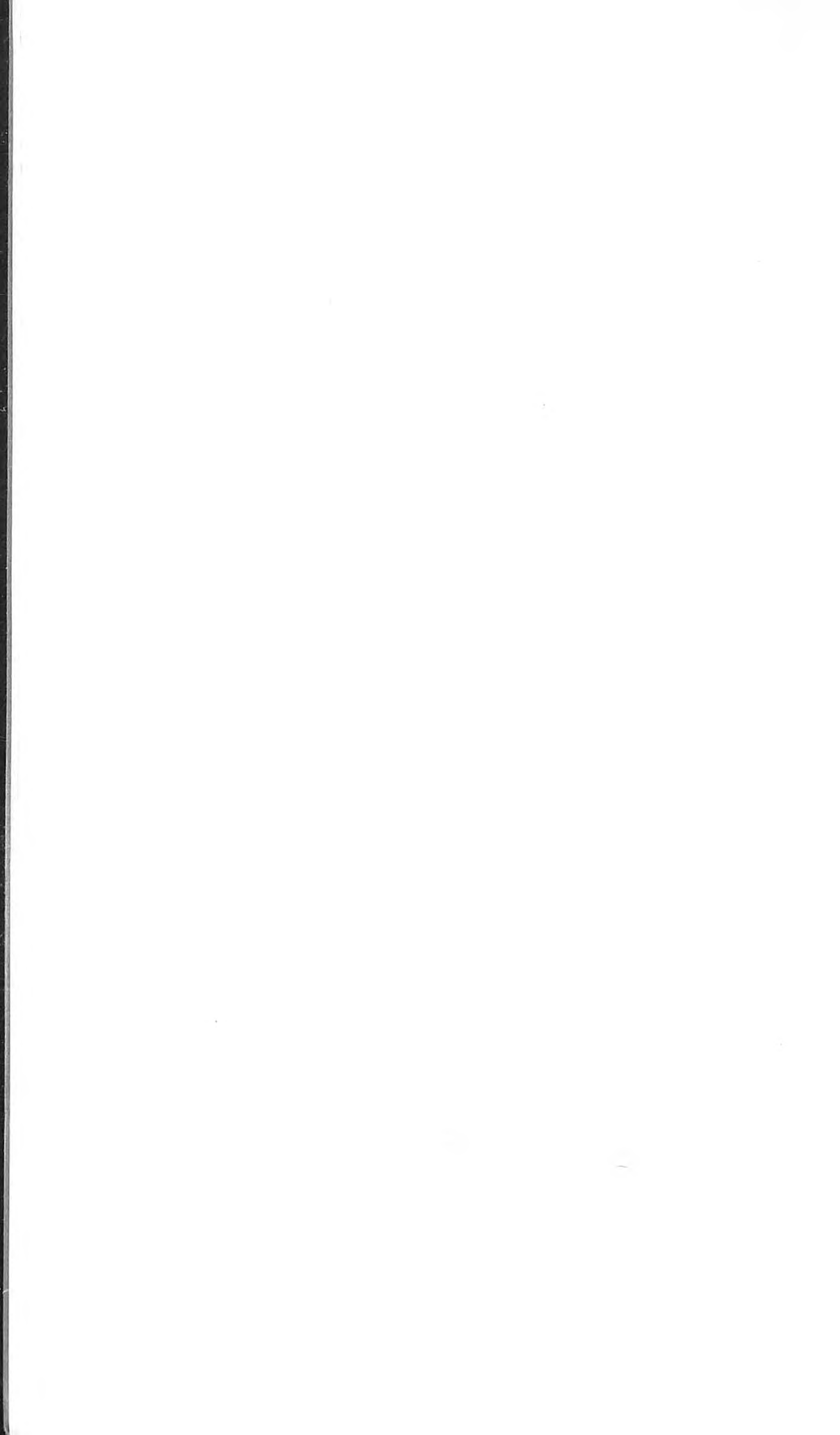
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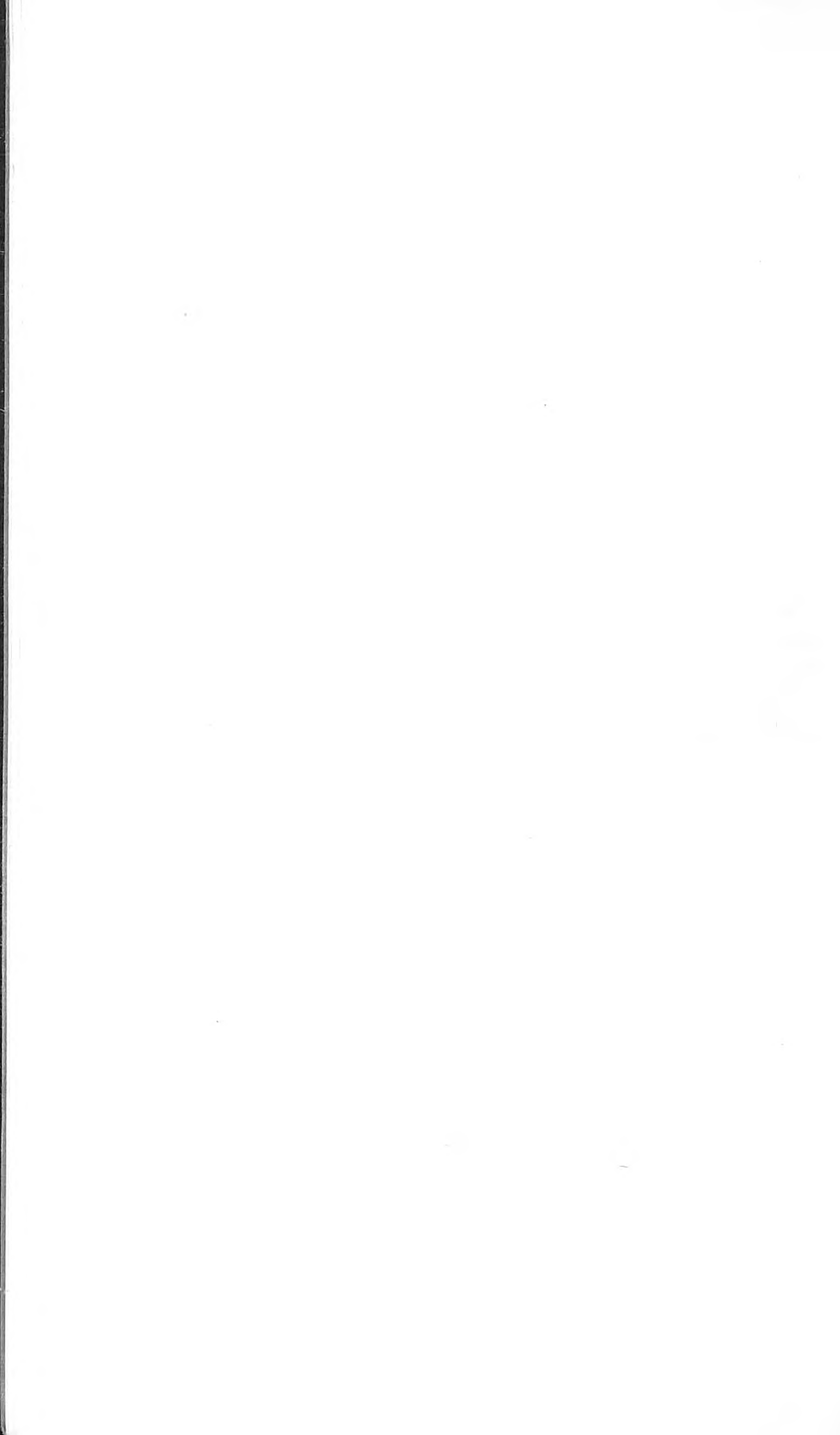
Pacific Collective (Marxist-Leninist)

May, 1979



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We have found grounds for optimism about the potential party-building forces in this country by seeing the enthusiasm and seriousness with which many comrades whom we know undertook the task of criticising an earlier draft of this book. We believe that their comments led to major improvements on that draft. They will have to decide for themselves whether they agree, but we do want to convey our deep appreciation for their help.



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NOTE ON ABBREVIATIONS

Frequently-cited works are abbreviated as follows:

LCW Lenin, *Collected Works*

MESW Marx and Engels, *Selected Works*. If a volume number is given, the reference is to the three-volume edition by Progress Publishers (Moscow); otherwise the one-volume edition by International Publishers (New York) is cited.

MSW *Selected Works of Mao Tse-tung*

MSR *Selected Readings from the Works of Mao Tsetung*

SW Stalin, *Works*

“LCW 4: 279” means Volume 4, p. 279 of *Collected Works*; similarly, “MSW II: 137” means Volume II, p. 137 of *Selected Works*.

I

Introduction

Reason and experience have long since proved that the more unified and organized the communists of a country are, and the more they include in their ranks the activists of the working class, the better they can fulfill their theoretical and practical tasks. A high level of unity, organization, and working-class composition requires the formation and continued development of a single, correct, Leninist party. Nothing can contribute more to the fulfillment of *all* our duties to the international proletariat than building such a party.

There are, of course, a half dozen self-appointed U.S. "vanguard parties," and other groups are organized like parties and try to fulfil the functions of one, regardless of what they call themselves. Conspicuously absent, however, is a party that consistently promotes a correct line on the major questions facing the proletariat, unites most communists, and leads the workers' movement, while counting many revolutionary workers among its members. Furthermore, none of the existing parties and party-like organizations can become *such* a party without rectifying serious opportunist deviations. This book is directed to those who agree with this assessment, and we will not try to prove its correctness here.

Because a vanguard party is the most basic tool for enabling communists to carry out our revolutionary work, the absence of such a party means that party-building is the central task of U.S. communists. A party that can lead a revolutionary proletarian movement will not arise spontaneously. In planning and evaluating our work, every task communists undertake, every commitment we make of our resources, must be considered in light of how it will contribute to the work of building a vanguard party. Any other ordering of priorities would cause us to make choices, consciously or unconsciously, that seriously delay the work of party-building. Such delays are indefensible.

SPONTANEITY IN PARTY-BUILDING

A widespread contrary view was most openly articulated by the former August 29th Movement (now part of the League for Revolutionary Struggle). The A.T.M. opposed judging all communist tasks in the context of party-building and argued that there are no significant differences in the tasks of communists before and after we have built a vanguard party.¹ We will later show that the party-building line then put forward was essentially this: act today as if we are the party, and sooner or later we will somehow become it.

¹*Revolutionary Cause*, 11/76, p. 11.

The Revolutionary Union expressed the same line under the slogan, "Build the mass movement." The same approach to party-building could well reappear, in new forms, among forces like the Philadelphia Workers Organizing Committee, which believe that party-building is, essentially, fusing communism with the workers' movement. Moreover, the line of building the party simply by trying to work as one also guided those who created the parties which we have today, groups that still blind themselves to the fact that they have yet to develop the advanced theory, the ties to the masses, and the communist unity around a correct political line which are hallmarks of a true vanguard party.

Communists must analyze our movement's continued weaknesses in each of these areas and identify means for overcoming them, not just work now in the mass movement as if we had a vanguard party capable of leading that movement well. We, too, strongly emphasize the need for practice in the workers' movement in this period; but one of our differences with the party-building positions of the former A.T.M. and other "pre-parties" is our recognition that communists' goals in this practice, and our commitment of resources to it, must be less than what they would be if we had a vanguard party. It takes a more discerning analysis of what is required to move from what communists are, to what we want to become, than to decide that we can transform our movement simply by acting as if we have achieved that transformation. The same applies to those groups that call themselves the vanguard party, with no sense of how far we all must go to create such a party.

Spontaneity in party-building takes other forms, too. Many collectives and individuals, perhaps painfully aware of their own limitations, wait for someone else to take the initiative. Or they ignore discussions on party-building, having heard the "Revolutionary Wing" talk the subject to death, and do so in terms of meaningless—or wrong—formulas. In the meantime, they try to develop political line independently and carry out practice on their own. Because they generally seem to be more open to struggle over their ideas, and thus more capable of rectifying weaknesses, than members of the consolidated parties and "pre-parties," it is imperative for such comrades to turn their attention to the problem of how the party will be built and what they can do to help.

PARTY-BUILDING LINE AND POLITICAL LINE

Because party-building is our central task, and because our movement certainly lacks agreement on a correct party-building line, we agree with the Proletarian Unity League's statement that a correct party-building line is the key link in permitting U.S. communists to move forward on our tasks.²

(We also agree with the P.U.L.'s pointing out the distinction between party-building line and political line. Political line is the line to guide the proletariat in its struggle against the bourgeoisie. It addresses issues like the national question, other questions of democratic rights, the state and the struggle against it, etc.³ Party-building line covers such questions as the

²P.U.L., 2, 3, *Many Parties of a New Type?: Against the Ultra-Left Line*, p. 28. In later citations to this book, we simply refer to "P.U.L."

³Ibid., pp. 44-45.

theoretical and practical tasks facing communists outside the existing parties, how to organize ourselves to carry out those tasks, who should be united in a joint party-building effort, and what conditions must be met to form a party. It is about such questions that we write this pamphlet, and in the immediate period it is mainly about them that we hope to engage in struggle for unity with other comrades.)

Many communists in entirely different sections of the movement think it incorrect to speak of party-building line apart from political line. They believe that the way to begin building a party is to use fundamental political line questions (especially the international situation, at present) to "demarcate" the genuine, or at least the most correct, Marxist-Leninists. According to this position, the best forces should begin discussing party-building line with each other only after they have been grouped by this process of demarcation.

We hold that building the genuine vanguard party must begin with uniting basically all who can be united on *how* to build it, including how to resolve disputed political line questions. The international situation is undeniably a crucial issue, and the revolution will not succeed either in a period in which the proletariat is led by social-chauvinists or one in which propaganda for internationalism has little credibility because the communists base their position on a whitewashing of the USSR's imperialism. Nor, we might add, will the revolution succeed if communists consistently adopt incorrect tactics towards reformist trade union leaders, or fail to resolve the national question correctly, etc.

We believe that it is only the correct party-building line that will permit many communists to systematically take up these and other burning questions, solve them, and win over additional forces through both our polemics and the test of practice. Secondly, we do think that, beyond agreement on party-building, there are additional limits to those who could contribute to a party-building effort, as we explain later.

In the pages that follow, and especially in Chapter V, we defend our point of view on who should unite. What we want to make clear here, for those who doubt the correctness of considering party-building line apart from political line, is that their belief that the way to begin is to use political line to draw lines of demarcation *is itself a party-building line*. Rather, it is a common feature of several different party-building lines. We will state the basis for our views; and comrades who believe party-building should begin with the use of political line to identify the party-builders surely have a rationale, which they can explain as well. They should enter the debate over party-building line and provide that explanation, not act as if there is nothing to debate because they have assumed that one of the key questions of party-building is not a question at all.

(Occasionally, as in the preceding paragraphs, we criticize the views of other comrades without naming any group in particular. We do so only when we are unaware of any published statement of the views on which we are commenting, but have heard those views expressed privately enough so that we believe that they have some influence.)

SUMMARY OF P.C. LINE

Here we provide an overview of our position on how to create a communist party that can educate and organize the proletariat and provide strategic and

tactical leadership in its struggle for the overthrow of capital.

Such a party must be theoretically advanced, i.e., its line must be based on a deep grasp of Marxism-Leninism and a thorough Marxist understanding of U.S. society, both in order to chart the revolutionary path and in order to prove to the workers and their allies that socialist revolution is the solution to the contradictions facing them in daily life. Second, it must make every effort to include within it as large a proportion of the country's genuine socialist revolutionaries as possible, keeping its members united around a correct communist line. Every failing on this score weakens the party's forces and strengthens those forces which, consciously or unconsciously, urge opportunist lines on the working class. Finally, the successful communist party must be a workers' party; it must attract ever-growing numbers of working-class comrades into its ranks and become the actual leader of the working-class movement as rapidly as conditions permit.

These three essentials, revolutionary theory, communist unity, and fusion of the communist and workers' movements, certainly do not exhaust the requirements for a party which is to lead the revolution. We have said nothing about the development of the press, military training, etc., each of which will be needed for the party to grow and do its work. However, theory, unity, and fusion are the most basic factors which must exist for communists to be the organized vanguard of the working class. (This is not to say, however, that no party should be *formed* until these three factors are at a high level. As the P.U.L. has pointed out, the process of building the party, i.e., expanding and strengthening it, always continues after its formation; and communists must distinguish between the requirements for party-formation, and what it will take for that party to play its vanguard role.⁴ We discuss the requirements for party-formation in Chapters IV and IX, below.)

The development of theory, unity, and fusion is extremely low right now. Many communists consider themselves weak in their grasp of basic Marxist-Leninist theory on some important questions, and many who consider their grasp stronger must be mistaken, since there are so many differences among us (and we cannot all be right). The same observation is true of the application of fundamental principles to the development of political line. In addition, our movement's theoretical weakness is most striking of all in the area of a concrete grasp of the particular motion and development of U.S. society, for which we lack even a basic class analysis.

The crippling disunity among Marxist-Leninists needs little documentation. Only those who are convinced that everyone outside of their own small group is an immutable opportunist can think that communists are anywhere near uniting our forces for fighting the class enemy. We have to agree with the terse judgment of a bourgeois observer, writing in a book which assesses the "communist threat" in each country of the world:

Maoist Groups. The Maoist [i.e., anti-revisionist] movement in the USA is composed of a large number of small groups which disagree very strongly with each other. The recent upheavals in China have caused a great deal of uncertainty and

⁴P.U.L., pp. 80-82.

confusion. . . .⁵

As of this writing, we see signs that the "left" sectarianism that led to this state of affairs might be starting to erode, but both serious line disagreements and sectarian evaluations of how to handle those disagreements continue to give us "a large number of small groups," with nowhere near the unity needed to carry out serious revolutionary work.

It is also evident that the communist and workers' movements are much more separate, than merged into one, and that our tasks in changing that situation are very great.

The discussion that follows is divided according to the tasks facing U.S. communists today. These tasks include the study, development, and advocacy of revolutionary theory; certain forms of practice, mainly in workers' struggles; and creating the form of organization corresponding to those tasks and the state of our forces. These tasks correspond only roughly with the creation of the theory, level of fusion, and unity that we need, since work on *each* task helps further the development of each of the essential factors for a vanguard party.

We can discuss these tasks only one at a time in the chapters below, but we consider them all interconnected and absolutely essential. There are extremely pressing theoretical tasks which must be taken up immediately. In fact, theoretical weakness is the main obstacle to moving all our work forward. Comrades must simultaneously do as much agitation, propaganda, and providing practical leadership to the workers' struggles as we can now, within limits set by the need to devote substantial resources to our other tasks and by current weaknesses in our abilities to lead the people.

Finally, carrying out our theoretical and practical tasks will be impossible unless those communists presently willing to engage in an open-minded struggle for unity organize ourselves into a network. Such a network cannot form immediately; those circles and individuals who would join it must struggle for a common analysis of the situation and our tasks in this period. The network must develop an agenda for carrying out our theoretical work, including settling political line questions; carry out a division of labor for doing that work; provide the forms for struggling systematically for unity on the questions taken up; encourage the widest exchange of summations of practical work and agitational and propaganda materials; and develop and implement plans for the long-term struggle for unity with at least the better rank and file communists in other organizations that are now too sectarian to even see the need for such joint efforts.

Such a network needs to be well organized, with central coordination. But it should not have a leading body with special responsibility for the elaboration of political line, or for publishing agitation and propaganda that all constituent groups are committed to circulating as their own. True ideological and practical leadership will have to emerge in the course of the work of the organization.

When a significant body, hopefully the majority, of the members of the

⁵Richard F. Starr, ed., *Yearbook on International Communist Affairs: 1978* (Hoover Institution Press: Stanford, 1978), p. 419.

network agree on a political program, agree on how a nationwide democratic-centralist organization should function internally, and have developed tested leaders, they should adopt the democratic-centralist form. (A decision for only part of the network to do so, however, should only be made if it becomes clear that continued struggle with the remainder is fruitless.) This form of organization, as we show later, is a party, though it will probably not yet be *the* party of U.S. communists or the organization of the proletarian vanguard. However, by using the democratic-centralist form of organization, the new party will be better suited to continue the development of theory, improve its vanguard character in practice, and struggle for unity with other communists.

In the next three sections of this chapter, we describe the forces to which this book is directed; address, inconclusively, the question of the main danger among U.S. communists; and add some concluding remarks.

THE FORCES WE ADDRESS

Obviously the party-building tasks we have listed will not be taken up by those who already consider an existing party (declared or, like the L.R.S., undeclared) to be the answer. Therefore this book is directed mainly to "independents" and members of local circles and collectives. (Sometimes we refer to these groups as the "non-party forces"; the term does not, of course, mean "against building a party.")

Among these forces, we are aware of perhaps 30 collectives with a more or less public presence; but it is also obvious that there are many comrades who consider themselves communists and are meeting in groups that are either less developed or have had no occasion to announce their existence publically. Furthermore, the disorganization of non-party forces is so extreme that there are undoubtedly groups that we have never heard of, even though they have published pamphlets or articles.

Among the less visible forces, some comrades have temporarily withdrawn from even following the seemingly endless, and fruitless, polemics of the communist movement. They concentrate on their own practice and independent study of one or another political question. The remaining forces are roughly grouped into three camps, according to, of all things, their analysis of the international situation. One group supports the opportunist Theory of Three Worlds, although they have such important differences over its meaning and application that some would define the internationalist duties of the U.S. working class in essentially the same way as opponents of the Theory of Three Worlds would. We do not know how much these groups are in communication with each other or look to each other as the best party-building forces. But they are probably influenced by the fact that most of the communist movement, including the pro-Three-Worlds organizers of the CP(M-L) and L.R.S. "unity committee," does consider an analysis of the international situation the means of finding such forces.

A second grouping is unconvinced that the Soviet Union is a consolidated social-imperialist superpower and that its "progressive" aid to liberation movements is a tactic for seeking neo-colonial footholds, though they readily admit that it is run by revisionist leaders who exploit their own people, oppress Eastern Europe, play a counter-revolutionary role by supporting revisionist

parties elsewhere, and are not always allies of national liberation struggles. These forces generally rely on the *Guardian* to tell them about international events. Some, in basic agreement with at least elements of the Philadelphia Workers Organizing Committee's party-building line, are affiliated nationally in the Organizing Committee for an Ideological Center, whose members sometimes call themselves "the Trend." Others are in *Guardian* clubs or are not organized in any national form. Most of these forces see their grouping as anti-ultra-left, or as "anti-dogmatist" (and anti-revisionist).

We are in the third camp, one sometimes ignored by the first two. These circles and individuals believe that both the U.S. and the USSR are imperialist superpowers but absolutely reject the Theory of Three Worlds and its implications, including the idea that strengthening the U.S. or Western European bourgeoisie in any way could benefit the people of the world. This is the line of quite a few anti-revisionist parties in the world, including the Party of Labor of Albania. Here we sometimes use the term "pro-P.L.A." as a convenient label for these circles, but in fact they have widely varying assessments of the consistency of the P.L.A.'s ideological leadership. The predominant tendency within this section of the movement, too, is to look internally for close allies in party-building.

These groupings are not homogenous or static. A counter-current among the OCIC forces, though on the verge of expulsion at this writing, gravitates towards some form of the Three Worlds Theory and also tries to bring about a realignment that would group all opposed to ultra-leftism as the main danger in the communist movement. The *New Voice*, a staunchly pro-Three-Worlds group, has criticized the CP(M-L) and L.R.S. "unity committee" for using the international situation as a means of excluding forces who would otherwise struggle over political line differences. There are comparable doubts within the "pro-P.L.A. tendency" that this grouping that has arisen spontaneously happens to contain all of the best party-building forces, although our own collective has been the only vigorous advocate of struggling over party-building line with comrades outside of the pro-P.L.A. camp.

As we already suggested in our previous discussion of the relationship between party-building line and political line, we do not think that struggles over party-building line should be taking place only *within* each of these three historically-evolved groupings. To give a further explanation of our position, at this point, would only anticipate much of the material in the chapters that follow. Here we simply want to make it explicit that what we are urging, and seeking to assist, is the radical realignment of non-party forces, temporarily ignoring the international-situation-defined boundaries, to unite those who can cooperate in struggling out *all* our differences and taking up our other party-building tasks.

This book is not the beginning of attempts to bring about such a realignment. That beginning was apparently made by the P.U.L., even before the pro-Three-Worlds and pro-P.L.A. forces split. Nor can this book possibly be the end of a struggle to regroup the non-party forces. In fact one of its shortest chapters is one of the most important: the one that calls for the publication of a theoretical journal devoted solely to continuing the struggle over party-building line.

The attempt to address such different segments of the communist movement

in a single work makes this book somewhat difficult to follow. It vastly increases the number of questions that must be dealt with, and it sometimes takes the reader through polemics against mistaken views that he or she never held in the first place. We saw no practical way to avoid this weakness.

In addition, our polemics do not focus on the lines of one or two representative organizations. This is because the confusion and diversity of views on party-building line is so great that no such representative organization exists. In general, when explaining our differences with some other common position on a party-building question, we try to consider the arguments of those who appear to be the most serious and persuasive advocates of that position. In addition, we try to give examples of both the "left" and the right deviations on each important question, even on questions where the only influential deviation has been towards an ultra-left party-building line, in an attempt to help clear away some of the existing confusion on whether particular forms of opportunism are "left" or right.

OUR VAGUENESS ON THE MAIN DANGER

It will become clear below why we consider the line that led to the formation of the existing parties to be an ultra-left party-building line. But identifying a main deviation in the communist movement *overall* also requires an analysis of the political lines and of the tactics in mass work of a myriad of organizations. For petty bourgeois communists who deviate from the correct line are not always consistent in their opportunism; vacillation and inconsistency can, and do, produce right opportunism in some areas of work while "leftism" emerges in others. Our own limitations have prevented us from developing an overall analysis of the prevalence of "leftism" and rightism in the U.S. communist movement. We do know that both types of deviations are significant enough here that it is not self-evident, to all with eyes to see, which is the more influential.

For comrades who have no doubt that right opportunism is the main danger, we note the following points which, among others, have caused us to reexamine the matter: (1) Neglect of theory can come from the "left," particularly from anarcho-syndicalist influence, as well as from the right.⁶ (2) Over-ambitious attempts by an unprepared "vanguard" to lead the mass

⁶This proposition will sound outrageous to some, for there is immense confusion on this question within our movement. Just the same, "left" opposition to theory has long been recognized internationally. In a very useful article, "The Objective and Subjective Factors in the Revolution," (*Albania Today*, Jan.-Feb., 1973), Foto Cami wrote,

In fact, some representatives of the "leftist" forces, irrespective of their subjective aims and objectives, also stand on a position of advocating spontaneity. They negate the necessity of theory, scientific consciousness, they rise against Lenin's thesis that without revolutionary theory there can be no revolutionary movement, they deny the role of the vanguard armed with the revolutionary theory of Marxism-Leninism, they oppose the necessity of working out clear political programmes, scientific strategy and tactics.

For further study of "left" disdain for theory in favor of "action," see Marx, letter to F. Bolte, in Marx, Engels, Lenin, *Anarchism and Anarcho-Syndicalism* (International Publishers: N.Y., 1972), p. 56; Marx and Engels, *The Alliance of Socialist Democracy*.

movement are “left” errors, despite the commonplace that “building the mass movement” is always rightist. (3) The communist movement is, by and large, failing to lead and merge with the workers’ movement because of lack of credibility and inability to win workers over to our perspective, not because we have moved in so quietly and raise so few new ideas that we are indistinguishable from the masses of workers. (4) Relations between each major communist organization and other communists—often called “hegemonist”—manifest “left” sectarian abhorrence of compromise, refusal to be open to struggle and criticism, and elevation of every difference to “lines of demarcation,” not the unprincipled unity of right opportunists who compromise on everything to have us all join one big happy party.⁷ (5) Until recently at least, reports in the communist press on mass work gave much attention to the “correctness” of the slogans of a “coalition” (e.g., “Fight national oppression”) and little to the problems of forging a real united front with reformist forces and correctly struggling for our views within the united front. (6) The idea of running presidential and congressional candidates—historically a favorite of right opportunists, mandatory for communists in most circumstances (if done correctly), and anathema to ultra-lefts⁸—is never even mentioned in our movement. (7) The Revolutionary Communist Party applies thinly-disguised dual-unionist trade union tactics, and the CP(M-L) took some less consistent steps in the same direction.

Nevertheless, we are not convinced that “left” opportunism is the main danger. We have seen too much right opportunism in the practice of some forces locally, and we see real signs of right opportunism among the emerging “anti-‘left’ ” forces. Most such signs, in aspects of party-building line, are discussed in the body of this book. In addition, the PWOC at least, seems to accept the right opportunist essence of the Theory of Three Worlds’ concept of propping up weaker imperialists against the stronger, disagreeing only on which international forces are which. And, as those who were apparently being expelled from the OCIC as this book went to press pointed out, “the Trend’s” vagueness on the Soviet Union is tied to a tendency to underrate the danger of revisionism. This may be a natural reaction to “lefts’ ” always “aiming the main blow” at reformists and revisionists while forgetting the bourgeoisie itself, but in our opinion it is a rightist reaction nonetheless.

Moreover, the “anti-‘lefts’ ” vastly oversimplify things when they identify

., *ibid.*, p. 113; “Anarchism and Socialism,” LCW 5: 327-28; *What is to be Done?*, *ibid.*, 511-13 & fn. on 513; “Revolutionary Adventurism,” LCW 6: 185-87; “Bellicose Militarism,” LCW 15: 195; “‘Left-Wing’ Childishness and the Petty-Bourgeois Mentality,” LCW 27: 343; *History of the CPSU(B)*, p. 116; “Introducing the Communist,” MSW II: 293.

In the event that a later writer upbraids us for stating that inattention to theory can be a manifestation of “left” opportunism, without quoting these sources and claiming that we have somehow misinterpreted them, *we urge the reader to regard such an author as an obfuscator, not an honest polemicist.*

⁷Has the reader ever tried explaining to a non-communist that one of the differences between Trotskyists and Marxist-Leninists is that *Trotskyists* continually split into competing organizations?

⁸See Lenin’s “*Left-Wing*” *Communism—An Infantile Disorder*.

the Theory of Three Worlds as a line that is ultra-left in form because it is premised on a sharper struggle against revisionism (the USSR) than against the open imperialist superpower in which we live. That observation may be valuable in helping to understand why some forces accept the social-chauvinist line, but it raises a small part of that line to the predominant aspect. Most of the rationale for the "theory" is based on classic right opportunist reasoning about drawing forces that are in fact enemies into the united front by (1) ignoring an analysis of their class interests, (2) ignoring the costs of giving up proletarian independence and initiative, concessions that are necessary to forge the alliance called for, and (3) trying to stampede people into tactics of retreat by overstating the gravity of a situation facing them (in this case, the war danger). (See *Peking Review* #45 (1977).)⁹

On the question of "left" and right opportunism, we should say a few words about the Proletarian Unity League's *Two, Three Many Parties of a New Type?*. This book is a very serious and ambitious attempt to examine the U.S. communist movement as a whole and the problems plaguing it. We found it extremely helpful in exposing some of the outright falsehoods about how to tell "leftism" from rightism, and in showing the real seriousness of "left" sectarianism in the communist movement. However, the book is weakened by over-reliance on examples, often the most blatant ones, to prove its case on the overwhelming hegemony of ultra-leftism among U.S. communists, rather than taking up the even more difficult task of proving that the examples are as typical as the P.U.L. believes. Equally important, and this is one reason why we fear the rise of rightist tendencies within what the P.U.L. calls the "anti-'left' reaction," the comrades' own solutions veer to the right—or at least leave the door open for right errors—on almost every question they address.¹⁰ We examine some of these deviations in the chapters that follow.

(Note: Because of widespread confusion, which we shared, leading to the identification of many forms of "leftism" as right opportunism, we have prepared an internal document which attempts to outline the different forms opportunism can take. It is heavily footnoted to "classical" sources for further study. If we can, we will revise it for publication; but we will be happy to send a copy of the present document to comrades who request it.)

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We conclude this introductory chapter with two more comments. First, in

⁹Thus the Bay Area Communist Union has not, as the PWOC claims, defected from the anti-"lefts" and thereby proven the instability of those who accept the supposedly "left" international line. The ideological foundations of that line fit their rightist united-front practice to a T, and a careful reading of their pamphlet *Marxism-Leninism-Mao Tsetung Thought*, where they supposedly have switched to "revisionism as the main danger" among U.S. communists, shows that they have accomplished this switch only by accepting the Chinese revisionists' decision to call ultra-leftism a form of revisionism.

¹⁰This is further confirmation that the Theory of Three Worlds, which the P.U.L. apparently supports in some measure, can appeal to those with right opportunist tendencies as well as to those who make fighting revisionism an end in itself.

this book we polemicize quite sharply against the lines of other organizations, including several with which we would like to build comradely relations. Sharp public polemics do not signify a break, at least if they are based on a serious analysis of opposing arguments, rather than on mere name-calling. What they do mean is that the polemicizing party takes seriously its responsibility to identify and oppose erroneous lines and opportunist arguments, even if the promoters of those lines and arguments are not at all consolidated opportunists.

Second, the importance of comrades' taking up party-building cannot be emphasized too strongly, especially in this period when the rise of revisionism in China and splits in the world communist movement give a special urgency to the study of many other questions as well. "Independents" in particular, trying to fight off demoralization and any doubts about the viability of communism itself, often want to retreat from the "hassles" of the communist movement and study independently these new developments and the basic questions which they raise. For that matter, some collectives, too, are still following U.S. communists' decade-old pattern of wanting to quickly study, adopt a position on, and polemicize furiously about every new, important question that the flow of events continually raises. (At this date the leading candidate for the 1979 Demarcating Question of the Year is the historical role of Mao Tse-tung.) To these comrades we say, your duties to the working class demand a party spirit, demand partially foregoing *individual* attempts to satisfy yourselves on all the unsettling questions that have been—and will always be—raised. As the Wichita Communist Cell recently wrote to an extreme advocate of individual circles' separately taking positions on each new question,

...[A]nd what after Mao Tse-tung Thought? What if imperialist war breaks out? Is the *most important* thing deciding questions on imperialist war? And what if there would be a revisionist take-over in the PLA—would this be the *most important* thing to deal with? What if after that our bourgeois "democracy" turns fascist—would the *main thing* be debates on the nature of fascism? What if all these things happened about the same time in the near future? If deciding these things were the *main thing when we don't have a party*, how will building and actually *forming* the party and putting it firmly on its feet (Stalin) *ever take place*? Wouldn't it be better to have a party which can decide lines on burning questions a thousand times better than we can now? When do we form the party in all this?

Though the question of how to build the proletarian party is not the only one communists should deal with now, it should receive such concentrated attention that every comrade becomes satisfied that he or she can answer it and joins an organized effort to carry out the work with forces who can agree on the situation and our tasks.

II

Theoretical Tasks

Marxist theoretical work is the study of social development, pursued to enable the working class to facilitate that development and hasten the transition from capitalist to communist society. Thus studying and defending the universal principles of Marxism-Leninism is theoretical work. So is analyzing the particular questions facing the U.S. revolution (which should not be separated from study of Marxist-Leninist principles). And so is studying the details of U.S. social development to enable communist agitators and propagandists to prove the decline of capitalism; the nature of the state; the sources of war, national oppression, unemployment, etc.¹

The latter two kinds of theoretical work require a great deal of both library research and investigation of current mass struggles, to develop a reliable and concrete understanding of the contradictions underlying the motion of this society. Key topics include the international situation as it has developed and is developing; the history, conditions, and current levels of struggle and consciousness of the various strata of the working class; the same regarding the oppressed nationalities and women; the definitions, interests, behavior, and outlook of the other classes in society, and their relationships to each other and to the revolutionary proletariat; the role and methods of the state, the trade unions, the churches, the ideological apparatus of the bourgeoisie, etc.; and the history of the work of communists in this country.

Such study is required to develop strategy and tactics based on reality, to answer other programmatic questions, and to ground our agitation and propaganda in the facts of U.S. social life. Before considering to what extent this work can and must be taken up before formation of a party, let us look at each of these needs more closely.

THEORY AND STRATEGY

Communists need Marxist-Leninist study of the subjects listed above in

¹Some comrades understand the term *theory* to refer only to general principles of Marxism-Leninism, and not to detailed studies of concrete conditions. The point, however, of distinguishing between theoretical and practical activity is to distinguish between work aimed primarily at *knowing* and work aimed primarily at *doing*, and the investigations we speak of clearly fall into the former category. Lenin and Mao both used the term as we do, as passages quoted below demonstrate.

order to develop a strategy which, based on knowledge of the actual contradictions of U.S. society, identifies those class forces which should be won over as allies of the proletariat (and how reliable they can be as allies), those which must be neutralized, and those which will stand with the enemy. For example, in finance, commerce, government, the communications media, etc., there are large intermediate strata at various levels, mainly “mental workers,” but we know little about their outlooks or political behavior beyond generalizations which we know about the petty bourgeoisie of Marx’s time (small shopkeepers, craftsmen, and farmers). Even among the workers, there are whole sectors, such as office workers, which we know little about.

We all vaguely remember Lenin’s phrases about there being times when we can and must take advantage of contradictions among the enemy; but who among us can describe the different monopoly capitalist groups in the U.S., the characteristics of the non-monopoly bourgeoisie, the relationships among them, and their likely interactions as the economic crisis deepens?

Moreover, we need a great deal of study of the conditions and outlook of different strata in the working class itself. For staring us in the face is strong evidence that there are significant strata—besides the narrow labor aristocracy—that are temporarily in a material position that delays development of the inevitable revolutionary stirrings of the pauperized proletariat described by Marx and Engels.² Can we say that “the great majority” of U.S. workers are “scarcely, or even not at all, protected from extreme want”?³ If not, we must learn how much the relatively low level of socialist sentiment in the U.S. working class is linked to an imperialist superpower’s temporary ability to place sizable strata of the class in a situation of material privilege, relative to the usual lot of workers under capitalism. For to the extent that such a link exists, we must learn in what strata communist work will now bear the most fruit, as well as how to appeal to the more privileged strata and show them that the present deterioration in their conditions of life can only get worse, much worse, as long as capitalism survives.⁴

²The term *labor aristocracy* refers to a fairly stable stratum of the working class which, as a group, supports the interests of the bourgeoisie. Historically, it has been composed of both labor bureaucrats and skilled tradesmen who are thoroughly corrupted by high wages and other favorable conditions, which capitalists bloated with the superprofits of imperialism can let them have.

They are different from those broader strata of the class which can temporarily be given enough privileges, relative to the impoverished workers typical of capitalism, to be rendered fairly compliant while a particular imperialist enjoys superpower status. As the class struggle intensifies, the aristocracy will consistently stand for compromise and collaboration with the bourgeoisie, while temporarily privileged strata losing that status will, with some vacillation, move to struggle in their genuine proletarian interests.

³F. Engels, “Introduction” (1891) to *Wage Labour and Capital*, MESW 70.

⁴The major communist groups ignore the possibility that important sections of the class are temporarily inclined towards opportunism because of their material situation. They justify their “revolutionary” optimism by claiming that any different assessment is the same as the “bribe theory.” (E.g., Marxist-Leninist Organizing Committee, *Unite!*, 10/77, pp. 5 & 16.) Some socialists, like the Prairie Fire Organizing Committee, do deny

This question of material privilege and capitalist stabilization is no minor problem, despite U.S. communists' inattention to it. As a comrade has reminded us, Lenin believed that imperialism was quite literally the "eve" of the proletarian revolution, as his writings at the close of World War I show. Yet in the 60 years since then there has been no socialist revolution in an advanced capitalist country. Nonetheless, communists generally do not even see the lack of such revolutions as a phenomenon requiring investigation. If they recognize it at all, a few phrases about revisionist betrayals usually suffice to explain it away. But neither the historical practice of the proletarian movement nor any theoretical works by U.S. communists of the present or previous generations show that the unique problems of making revolution within powerful imperialist countries have been analyzed and solved.

There are other questions of strategic importance that the U.S. communist movement will have to come to grips with, and now is not too soon to begin, if it turns out that we have the resources to study them. Some comrades argue that there is a need to rediscover and defend basic Marxist-Leninist principles on such fundamentals as proletarian internationalism and the united front, along with several key questions of internal party life.⁵ Not having studied these questions ourselves, we do not endorse their conclusion that communists have a legacy of four decades of serious deviations in the world communist movement to overcome. However, that conclusion cannot be rejected out of hand. There is an undeniable need for some deep study and thinking, after a history that includes Stalin's failure to protest the dissolution of the CPUSA, the rapid rise of revisionism after 35 years of socialism in the USSR, the degeneration of communist parties worldwide, a revisionist takeover in China that came relatively easily (no civil war), the Theory of Three Worlds, and an apparent lengthy history of nationalist deviations that finally culminated in the recent fighting in Southeast Asia.

Of course the point of listing these events, each one alone tragic, is not to spread demoralization. It is to urge comrades to act like Marxists who must study and come to grips with these phenomena, in order to prevent their

the utility of communist work in the working class. They believe that workers, or white workers, are so "bribed" that there is little we can do here until after a series of revolutions in countries oppressed by U.S. imperialism. This is not the P.C. position. But we do insist that the focus, pace, and content of communist work must be based on the real position and outlook of the workers. These are social facts which cannot be known without investigation.

Those who would rather use the pure truths of Marxism about the proletariat as a revolutionary class to shut their eyes to the problems of working within an imperialist superpower should consider what happened—temporarily—to the English working class during the Nineteenth Century period of Britain's hegemony among the capitalist countries: "... The English proletariat is actually becoming more and more bourgeois. . . . [T]he workers gaily share the feast of England's monopoly of the world market and the colonies." (Engels, quoted in "Imperialism and the Split in Socialism," LCW 23: 112.) "... [H]istory made slow organizational and educational work the task of the day" because of several factors, including the fact that "the worker of Britain [was] corrupted by imperialist profits. . . ." (*The Tasks of the Proletariat in Our Revolution*, LCW 24: 86.)

⁵See, e.g., the book, *On the Roots of Revisionism*, distributed by Revolutionary Road Publications.

repetition. Only the bourgeoisie will benefit if we act like faithful religionists who can talk endlessly about the great science of Marx, Engels, Lenin, Stalin, and Chairman Mao, without analyzing communists' serious failures in trying to apply that science in recent decades.

THEORY FOR PROGRAM AND TACTICS

There are other questions which we must study so that our program can answer them, in order for that program to unite revolutionaries around a consistently revolutionary political line. There are, for example, many unsolved aspects of the national question (school integration, affirmative action and super-seniority, national self-determination). Other examples are the question of what class forces the proletariat can ally with internationally, the correct orientation towards the existing trade unions, and the woman question. These can only be settled by studying the theory that Marxism-Leninism has already developed and applying those principles to an investigation of current conditions.

(Even if correct lines on some of these questions are already understood in some quarters of our movement, it is clear that no more than the first half of the task which Mao called "the creation and advocacy of revolutionary theory" has been completed. The advocacy, the struggle for wide acceptance of the correct line and the isolation of die-hard opportunists, remains largely unfinished on many questions.)

Another area of necessary theoretical work is study of trends in the workers' movement and among the petty bourgeoisie, and in the bourgeoisie's use of reformist and repressive tactics, in order to develop offensive or defensive tactics that take these trends into account. For years assertions about "the rising tide of fascism" have been thrown around, based on particular *examples* of repression, films promoting reactionary ideologies, etc., with few facts to allow us to see what the *trend* is. Bourgeois democracy, however, has always included the use of varying levels of repression and reactionary ideology. What we must know is whether what Lenin called the combination of "the hangman and the priest" or "the knout [whip] and the biscuit" is presently that typical of bourgeois democracy or is changing qualitatively into fascism.

THEORY FOR PROPAGANDA AND AGITATION

One of the biggest reasons why communists need detailed study of this society is that even if we could somehow have the answers about strategy, tactics, and other political line questions without it, it takes real familiarity with social conditions in their particularity to give the workers the facts they must see if we are to win them away from the illusions which the bourgeoisie has promoted for so long. For this reason, theoretical work is essential for assisting the development of a communist working-class vanguard. We go into this point more deeply here, because it is one of the most important and yet least emphasized aspects of the need for theory.

Most contemporary communist agitation and propaganda which we have seen, if it deals with facts at all, is "example-based." One or two examples of, say, police repression, are presented, coupled with the assertion that such incidents are on the rise, and capped with the conclusion that the police

oppress working and oppressed people in the interests of the bourgeoisie. This can be presented in a fairly lively way, of course, and explained better or worse, according to the skill and understanding of the agitator. But as Lenin had to remind socialist theoreticians in another context, examples alone prove nothing. For they can mean entirely different things depending on their historical context, and they could be atypical of the phenomenon being discussed, rather than typical. What we need are “[f]acts. . . in their *entirety*, in their *interconnection*.”⁶

For example, when dealing with a police shooting of a minority person, we must refute the reformist explanation that the shooting was the act of a “rotten apple” on the police force. We can do this far better when we can show how many of these shootings have taken place in the last few years, the universal official response to such shootings (refusal to punish the killers, which amounts to a tacit “license to kill”), the kinds of mass struggle that led to the few examples of punishment, etc.

If we do understand what causes police killings, or inflation, or unemployment, or bad health and safety conditions at work—then of course *some* of the people faced with these contradictions will be open to our analyses of them, even if we do not have the broad factual data to prove that we are correct. But the bourgeoisie has long experience in “explaining” the same things. And what many comrades forget is that they have, in the main, had long success at it. The fact that communists have truth and the interests of the workers on our side does not make it any less of an uphill battle to prove that most workers’ present understanding of how this society works is largely mistaken. In our opinion, only a relative handful of workers, far fewer than the potential working-class vanguard, will see the correctness of Marxism-Leninism until we can prove it correct on the basis of its detailed, concrete explanations of the realities of *this* society, of the events they see and experience. And to do this we must take those facts “in their entirety,” not engage the bourgeoisie in a contest between examples that “prove that the system works” and those that “prove” that it only works for the bourgeoisie.

For example, the Marxist-Leninist Organizing Committee (now the CPUSA/M-L) told workers, in a sentence that could have been written by many others, that “the overwhelming tendency of the courts is to serve the bourgeoisie, as shown very clearly in recent Supreme Court rulings upholding the right of Nazis to terrorize Jewish and Black communities; the Bakke decision; court injunctions against strikes; and right to work laws.”⁷ If this is *proof* of the role of the courts, during the liberal “Warren Era” of the Supreme Court, someone could have easily proved that the courts serve the oppressed!

Comrades’ complacency regarding the theoretical poverty of the U.S. communist movement is so pervasive that we will consider three more illustrations of the pressing need for theoretical work to make our mass work effective. One is the necessity for materials that prove, *with facts*, the decline of the petty bourgeoisie in this country, the increasing squeeze which they are in. This necessity stems from widespread illusions among workers, and not

⁶“Statistics and Sociology,” LCW 23: 272.

⁷*Unite!*, 10/77, p. 7.

just the most backward, about starting their own businesses as an individual way out, or at least giving their own children an education and a better life. Such dreams need to be exposed for what they are, with a combination of economic data on the actual decline of the petty bourgeoisie and survey data, if available, on the number of workers who go through most of a career in the factory, nourished by a dream of getting out of it. Often it is the workers most capable of being working-class activists who harbor such dreams, the able, the confident ones, the ones who bridle at the idea of working to line the pockets of capitalists instead of working for themselves. We cannot defeat such powerful hopes by reiterating what the *Communist Manifesto* says about the decline of the petty bourgeoisie.

A different kind of example of theoretical weakness that badly damages propaganda and agitation is the whole subject of political economy. Comrades are aware, from time to time, of their inability to explain why inflation is now endemic here, despite the vitality of the question as an agitational issue. But the *entire* communist movement's failure to grasp the most basic Marxist economic concepts stood right out with the various "analyses" of the Proposition 13 tax-cutting movement. Here was a ready-made opportunity to explain the concept of surplus value. That concept shows that workers pay the cost of government whether the tax bill goes to their employers, who "pay" it from the surplus value which the workers produce, or to the workers, whose average wages would soon reflect the added cost of sustaining themselves. But communists were totally unprepared to teach workers the economics that show that their exploitation takes place not where they naturally feel that it does (where government, landlords, and merchants take their money), but at the workplace, where the capitalists take the products of their labor. And so most of us spread petty-bourgeois socialist slogans like "make the rich pay."

Our final illustration of the need for theoretical work in order to make practice effective concerns the role of the state in general. Despite broad cynicism about politicians, dislike of police, etc., the presence of illusions about the bourgeois democratic state as a force which *could* serve the interests of all classes equally and fairly is extremely widespread, even among the most progressive of non-socialist workers. This is evident to anyone who does mass work and who pays attention to what the people are thinking. And no wonder that these illusions are so widespread—with deep bourgeois democratic traditions and a material situation that permits fairly liberal use of concessions and reforms, the bourgeois ideologists can point to all kinds of real-world examples that "prove that the system works."

In a four-month period in 1978, the bourgeois press reported the following events: Congress blocked, as too threatening to citizens' rights, an I.R.S. computerized data bank. The Freedom of Information Act continued to be used to get damaging documents from the F.B.I. about its political police functions. Months before the Three Mile Island accident, California's nuclear regulatory agency blocked, on safety grounds, all new construction of nuclear power plants in the state, in the face of heavy industry opposition. The Pennsylvania legislature cut off funds to the University of Pennsylvania after the school fired maintenance workers who quit a company union to join the Teamsters. The House Banking Committee publically demanded that six big banks explain why they provided one billion dollars in loans to the Chilean junta after the Carter

administration cut off most government credits to the regime. The Olin Corporation, a large munitions maker, was fined \$510,000 for selling guns to the South African government and was also indicted on felony charges of concealing its mercury pollution of a river. The British government, in the wake of rising white chauvinist agitation and sentiment against South Asian immigrants, banned U.S. Ku Klux Klan leaders from visiting the country. Tenneco was indicted for bribing a Louisiana sheriff. The F.T.C. moved to restrict television commercials aimed at children.

This is only a partial list, from articles discovered casually as we read the daily newspaper.

With such events before workers' eyes, along with a life-long "education" about "democracy," a few counter-examples will win over no one, nor deepen the understanding of those who do have few illusions about the state. What we need to prove is that the concessions are the appearance—ultimately granted to forestall the growth of any threatening mass movement, that the dictatorship of the bourgeoisie is the essence, and that the state is firmly in the hands of the bourgeoisie. This can be done, of course. But to influence more than a handful of workers, we need more than Lenin's *The State and Revolution* (and a few current examples) to do it. (Some organizations' work is a little better, of course, but we are talking about more than the research which backs up particular newspaper articles by, say, the Workers Congress or the CPUSA/M-L.) Communists need a major propaganda piece, an all-sided study that presents an historical and current overview of the role and methods of the bourgeois state in the United States of America. A task force doing a year's research could produce propaganda, based on U.S. data, which proves the Marxist-Leninist thesis on the nature of the state. A book produced in that period of time would not be the last word on the subject, of course, but it could put into perspective all the opportunities for reform, cooptation, and exploitation of internal contradictions that exist in the democratic republican form of the bourgeois dictatorship. Many of our best worker contacts would read such a book, and it would surely help bring some of them closer to becoming communists themselves. Just as important, communists and our active contacts, armed with the facts contained in the propaganda piece, could do a far better job of producing persuasive agitation than we can do today.

The same need for theoretical work is equally true in seeing how other bourgeois institutions (churches, press, television) serve the existing order and in explaining both national oppression and the oppression of women. We must speak to the workers, including their most progressive and active representatives,⁸ coming not only from our knowledge of Marxism-Leninism and an example from the morning's headlines, but using an all-sided understanding of concrete realities here. And we must also do studies, particularly of the international situation and of political economy, that will permit us to deal with issues that *will become* burning questions.

We have worked with comrades who do believe that communists basically already have the theory that we need, in our knowledge of Marxism and a little

⁸I.e., those whom some would call "the advanced." We take up the question of to whom that term should be applied in Chapter III.

current events. Engels was contemptuous of such attitudes in his time:

The materialist conception of history has a lot of them nowadays, to whom it serves as an excuse for *not* studying history.

. . . In general, the word "materialistic" serves many of the younger writers in Germany as a mere phrase with which anything and everything is labeled without further study, that is, they stick on this label and then consider the question disposed of. But our conception of history is above all a guide to study, not a lever for construction after the manner of the Hegelian. All history must be studied afresh, the conditions of existence of the different formations of society must be examined individually before the attempt is made to deduce from them the political, civil-law, aesthetic, philosophic, religious, etc., views corresponding to them. Up to now but little has been done here because only a few people have got down to it seriously. . . . [T]oo many of the younger Germans simply make use of the phrase historical materialism (and *everything* can be turned into a phrase) only in order to get their own relatively scanty historical knowledge—for economic history is still in its swaddling clothes!—constructed into a neat system as quickly as possible, and then they deem themselves something very tremendous.

. . . You, who have really done something, must have noticed yourself how few of the young literary men who fasten themselves on to the Party give themselves the trouble to study economics, the history of economics, the history of trade, of industry, of agriculture, of the formations of society. . . . The self-sufficiency of the journalist must serve for everything here and the result looks like it. It often seems as if these gentlemen think anything is good enough for the workers. If these gentlemen only knew that Marx thought his best things were still not good enough for the workers, how he regarded it as a crime to offer the workers anything but the very best! . . .⁹

Engels's remark about the "self-sufficiency of the journalist" is particularly apropos, for, as we wrote some time ago, current communist agitation and propaganda also "too often have an 'instant analysis' quality, rather than being grounded in an all-sided understanding of the society."

LENIN AND MAO ON THEORY

Our emphasis on the need for so much investigation and study of U.S. society is orthodox Marxism. The general principles of the science—which were, after all, derived from study of particular societies—have never in themselves been enough to point the road forward. Lenin stated the theoretical tasks of the "socialist intelligentsia" in Russia in 1894, years before the Russian party was founded:

. . . [T]heir THEORETICAL work must be directed towards the concrete study of all

⁹Engels to C. Schmidt, Aug. 5, 1890, MESW 689-90.

By way of example of the practical value of theory, we note that Engels elsewhere urged another Marxist to complete his historical work on the rise of the modern German state, explaining that

[t]he dissipation of the monarchical-patriotic legends, although not really a necessary precondition for the abolition of the monarchy, which is a screen for class domination. . . is nevertheless one of the most effective levers for that purpose.

Engels to F. Mehring, July 14, 1893, Marx and Engels, *Selected Letters* (FLP: Peking, 1977), p. 93.

forms of economic antagonism in Russia, the study of their connections and successive development; they must reveal this antagonism wherever it has been concealed by political history, by the peculiarities of legal systems or by established theoretical prejudice. They must present an integral picture of our realities as a definite system of production relations, show that the exploitation and expropriation of the working people are essential under this system, and show the way out of this system that is indicated by economic development.

This theory, based on a detailed study of Russian history and realities, must furnish an answer to the demands of the proletariat—and if it satisfies the requirements of science, then every awakening of the protesting thought of the proletariat will inevitably guide this thought into the channels of Social-Democracy. The greater the progress made in elaborating this theory, the more rapidly will Social-Democracy grow. . . .

. . . [For an industrial worker to engage in an organized, sustained, revolutionary struggle, it is necessary] *to make him understand his position*, to make him understand the political and economic structure of the system that oppresses him and the necessity and inevitability of class antagonisms under this system.¹⁰

In 1941 and 1942, Mao emphasized that despite the gains made in the study of Marxist-Leninist works within the Chinese party, its theoretical level was still low because there had been so little investigation of China's own problems. "Just think," he asked, "how many of us have created theories worthy of the name on China's economics, politics, military affairs or culture, theories which can be regarded as scientific and comprehensive, and not crude and sketchy?"¹¹ He proposed,

We should place before the whole Party the task of making a systematic and thorough study of the situation around us. On the basis of the theory and method of Marxism-Leninism, we should make a detailed investigation and study of developments in the economic, financial, political, military, cultural and party activities of our enemies, our friends, and ourselves, and then draw the proper and necessary conclusions.¹²

Lenin, after insisting that, in *every* country, "[w]ithout revolutionary theory there can be no revolutionary movement," added that "for Russian Social-Democracy the importance of theory is enhanced by three other circumstances." Each one, or a comparable one, exists in the U.S. today as well:

. . . [F]irst, by the fact that our Party is only in process of formation, its features are only just becoming defined, and it has as yet far from settled accounts with the other trends of revolutionary thought that threaten to divert the movement from the correct path. . . .

Secondly, the Social-Democratic [communist] movement is in its very essence an international movement. This means. . . that an incipient movement in a young country can be successful only if it makes use of the experiences of other countries. . . .

Thirdly, the national tasks of Russian Social-Democracy are such as have never confronted any other socialist party in the world.¹³

¹⁰ *What the "Friends of the People" Are*. . . , LCW 1: 296-97, 299.

¹¹ "Rectify the Party's Style of Work," MSR 211-12.

¹² "Reform Our Study," *ibid.*, 206.

¹³ *What is to be Done?*, LCW 5: 369-70.

Communists in this country can no more dispense with such theory than the communists of Russia and China could. It need not all be "completed" before the situation will move forward, of course. But our movement's un-Marxist ignorance of the particulars of the contradictions and motions of the society in which we live is a tremendous obstacle to the unity of communists, the development of a program, the creation of a strategy that unites the proletariat with its friends and isolates its enemies, the elaboration of tactics suited to current conditions, and the carrying out of the truly effective agitation and propaganda required if we are to fuse communism with the workers' movement.

PRIORITIES FOR THEORETICAL WORK

We have stated the need for a very large amount of investigation, along with struggle to unite those who can be won to correct analyses, concerning both U.S. capitalist development and key questions in the history of the international communist movement. Clarity on basic issues of Marxism-Leninism must also be achieved. Finally, one of the goals of investigating U.S. society is the elaboration of a political line for its revolutionary transformation. All this study and struggle cannot be carried out at once, nor need it all take place before a party capable of becoming the proletariat's vanguard organization can be formed. Some priorities must be determined.

What *must* take place before a party should be formed is theoretical work and ideological struggle to permit adoption of a correct program. In fact a program is the statement of the required unity for a party, its "principles of unity." (We go into this more thoroughly in Chapters IV and IX, where we discuss the preconditions for party-formation.)

Therefore, since a pre-party organization must create the conditions for forming a party, one of its priorities for theoretical work and line struggle will be work which helps settle controversial programmatic questions, some of which have been mentioned previously. Chief among these, in our opinion, are:

- (1) an integral picture of present and predictable capitalist development in this country,
- (2) the class forces that can be reserves of the proletariat and the demands we support on their behalf (e.g., urban and rural petty bourgeoisie),
- (3) the internationalist duties of the U.S. working class and the world situation which gives rise to them,
- (4) various aspects of the national question,
- (5) other questions of democratic rights,
- (6) the basic orientation towards the trade unions (whether the strategy is to "move them to the left," try to destroy them and replace them with entirely new organizations, or work to take them over and convert them into either militant and democratic unions or into revolutionary mass organizations), and
- (7) the concrete meaning of equality for women.

Out of all the theoretical work we have listed, there will be differences of opinion on the conclusions of various studies. We have been asked whether we think that unity on all those conclusions is required. The answer is, certainly

Today's communists are not even close to this description. The number of workers who look to any communist forces for an understanding of an economic or political question, or for leadership in struggles against exploitation and oppression, is miniscule. The communists and other socialists of this country are overwhelmingly ex-students and other people of petty bourgeois backgrounds. We came to Marxism-Leninism from the anti-war/student movement, the Black and other national liberation movements, and the liberation support movement. There is a small but growing workers' movement, but today it is a movement for militant unionism, for union democracy, and for organization of unorganized plants, not a movement for socialism. In Europe, millions of workers vote for the parties that they think will bring them socialism; workers here are not in love with capitalism, but they overwhelmingly believe that no better system has been developed anywhere else.

These blunt truths are sobering, but they are no reason for pessimism. The development of a revolutionary proletarian socialist movement has to proceed step by step. Lenin long ago explained why, and he described experiences that began as ours has begun. Describing the tremendous strike movement of the 1890's in Russia, he wrote,

Taken by themselves, these strikes were simply trade union struggles, not yet Social-Democratic struggles. They marked the awakening antagonisms between workers and employers; but the workers were not, and could not be, conscious of the irreconcilable antagonism of their interests to the whole of the modern political and social system, i.e., theirs was not yet Social-Democratic consciousness. . . .

We have said that *there could not have been* Social-Democratic consciousness among the workers. It would have to be brought to them from without. The history of all countries shows that the working class, exclusively by its own effort, is able to develop only trade-union consciousness, i.e., the conviction that it is necessary to combine in unions, fight the employers, and strive to compel the government to pass necessary labour legislation, etc. The theory of socialism, however, grew out of the philosophic, historical, and economic theories elaborated by educated representatives of the propertied classes, by intellectuals. . . .

Hence, [in Russia,] we had both the spontaneous awakening of the working masses, their awakening to conscious life and conscious struggle, and a revolutionary youth, armed with Social-Democratic theory and straining towards the workers.¹

Elsewhere Lenin described the necessity for these two movements to merge:

At first socialism and the working-class movement existed separately in all the European countries. The workers struggled against the capitalists, they organized strikes and unions, while the socialists stood aside from the working-class movement, formulated doctrines criticising the contemporary capitalist, bourgeois system of society and demanding its replacement by another system, the higher, socialist system. The separation of the working-class movement and socialism gave rise to weakness and underdevelopment in each: the theories of the socialists, unfused with the workers' struggles, remained nothing more than utopias, good wishes that had no effect on real life; the working-class movement remained petty, fragmented, and did not acquire political significance, was not enlightened by the advanced science of its time. For this reason we see in all European countries a

¹ *What is to be Done?*, LCW 5: 375-76 (footnote omitted).

not. Our program, our required unity—within which differences are tolerable—will state our basic agreement on the nature and development of the U.S. social formation, the strategy of the proletariat, its attitude towards other class forces and political trends, and the basic political and economic demands for which it should fight, but not the details of every issue which agitation and propaganda will address. To illustrate, we will need unity on the communist orientation towards the state and democratic rights, but not on a particular propagandist's conclusions about whether government regulatory agencies are a concession to popular demands for controls on business, or simply a tool of the "regulated" corporations. The process of party-building, combined with study of other parties, will give us all a more concrete grasp of what a program must cover.

There is another consideration, one which should be given a weight equal to that of the program in a pre-party network's theoretical priorities. In the next chapter we explain why, though lacking a party, communists must carry out agitation and propaganda in the working class to help the development of a proletarian vanguard, a corps of socialist workers who will join, and preferably help create, a new communist party. If we are correct in asserting the need for such mass work in a pre-party period, then the second factor in determining priorities for investigation and study is the absence of materials to convince workers of the need for socialist revolution in the U.S. We already gave examples of such materials on pp. 15-18, above.

The work on the programmatic questions and the general social investigation needed for better agitation and propaganda will be overlapping and complementary. Giving balanced attention to those two priorities would improve our mass work as it helped settle key differences among us.

Later, when we are closer to formation of a party, another priority will come to the fore, viz., questions about the nature of the party itself. The main issues are probably how much disunity is tolerable within a single party and how to combat over-centralization and the underdevelopment of rank-and-file party members, but there will be other questions of organization as well. The struggle over such matters can be postponed for a time, because unity on them would not be essential until we near the point of party-formation. Moreover, by then our experience within the pre-party network could help us grasp questions of party organization in a much more concrete way.

We are purposely attempting only a sketchy answer to the question of theoretical priorities, by saying that particular proposals for study should be compared according to the contribution each could make to developing a program, making our agitation and propaganda more effective, and, later, establishing correct norms for internal party life. Beyond these general observations, we must say that the particular allocation of resources to theoretical work will depend largely on what the resources of the pre-party organization turn out to be, after it is formed. Moreover, making that allocation wisely requires a broader perspective than that of a single West Coast collective.

OVERESTIMATION AND UNDERESTIMATION OF THE NEED FOR THEORY

It is possible to overrate the need for such theoretical work, to argue that we

can engage in no meaningful practice until it has progressed much more, or to demand, as a precondition for forming a party, far more study and struggle than that required for agreement on a correct program and line on questions of organization. As later chapters show, this is not our position.

A far more serious problem in our movement is downgrading or liquidating the need for theoretical work, and it can come from either the "left" or the right. Many "lefts" do not underestimate the importance of theoretical differences in the least, but they often see little need for serious study and investigation of the way this society functions. There is a wide range of groups which recognize the importance of doing work in the workers' movement. They try—with varying degrees of consistency and in different settings—to raise a communist analysis of different questions. But they fail entirely to see how badly we are hindered in this work by our lack of detailed Marxist studies of concrete conditions in the U.S., studies that would permit us to do our agitation and propaganda based on *facts*. Regardless of whether their deviations on political line are right or "left," such groups are making a "left" error, the overestimation of the ease with which the masses, or their most developed representatives, can accept our ideas.

We would include in this category most of the parties and party-like groups, with the exception of the Communist Labor Party.¹⁴ Some (the MLOC, the former organizations of "the Revolutionary Wing") used to talk a lot about the importance of study of concrete conditions. Now they no longer even list this as among their major tasks. We cannot try to refute their position on this any more than we have above in explaining our own views, for, as far as we know, none of them has put words to paper to justify their belittling of our theoretical tasks. They just do not mention those tasks, and in the main they do not do them. Certainly we see no major organizational efforts bent in this direction; they clearly think that it is sufficient to go to the workers with the kind of agitation and propaganda which communists can produce now.

Inattention to theoretical work is also tied to the "left" sectarianism which these organizations and parties typically manifest towards the rest of us and towards each other. To adopt a correct line on party-building, a political question, or a tactical issue, mistaken comrades must, of course, be willing to struggle against their own opportunism, but they must also be presented with a well-reasoned and fully-documented analysis. (Often they must learn from their own experience, as well.) But we are in a movement filled with organizations which are willing to draw lines of demarcation between themselves and all the other "opportunists" based on positions stated in one or two newspaper articles, positions that are justified with a few "classical" quotations and a few contemporary facts. This is like the "leftism" of believing that the masses can be won over to a half-baked analysis, presented with few facts. It is wrong to make the same assumption about communists, too, and to write them off as opportunists if they do not display the same readiness for

¹⁴We exclude the C.L.P. because we know little about them, and what we do know appears to be fairly consistent right opportunism in the last couple of years. The former A.T.M. used to fairly consistently commit the "left" disregard for theory which we discuss here; but now they combine "left" sectarian anti-*Bakke* work with, locally at least, trade union work that is too reformist to require much theoretical backup.

instant "consolidation to the line" that is so typical of each group's own rank and file.

The classic model of *right* opportunist belittlement of theory was the Economists, whom Lenin opposed in *What is to be Done?*¹⁵ They opposed the theoretical struggle among revolutionaries, seeking to shield themselves from attacks on their "criticisms" of Marxism (a ploy which "lefts" have used as well). Moreover, they argued that confining the workers' movement to the daily, local struggle for trade unionist gains was the path to socialism. Therefore they had little need for study of the objective development of Russian society, for they had no intention of explaining that development to workers, nor of intervening to radically accelerate that development.

We think that contemporary examples of this deviation are the *Guardian*, the Bay Area Communist Union, and the Movement for a Revolutionary Left, all of which, in our opinion, promote rightist lines on our mass work and concurrently say little or nothing about serious study of this society.

CAN WE SOLVE THEORETICAL QUESTIONS BEFORE PARTY-FORMATION?

Another form of the right deviation appears in the Proletarian Unity League's analysis of the level of clarity which we can and should have on political line questions before uniting into a single party. While correctly opening the debate on what level of unity is necessary and possible for communists to work together in this period, they end up concluding that a *party* can be formed, apparently organized along democratic centralist lines, based on little more than unity on our party-building tasks, and the broad principles on which political line will eventually be based. The P.U.L. bases its argument largely on our supposed inability to take up many theoretical tasks and to settle disputed line questions before the formation of a party. They suggest the need for agreement on these issues:

the nature of the main danger to the communist movement, the tasks of communists in this period, the character and functioning of a Marxist-Leninist party, and, in order to orient the work of the newly-formed party, a rudimentary programmatic, strategic, and tactical line treating principally the relationship between democratic and socialist struggle in the U.S., as well as the basic features of international line [later explained as basic principles of internationalism, and agreement on the social-imperialist nature of the USSR]. . . . Our program will represent the ideological foundations upon which the Party rests, not the specifics of its political activity (as do some present Party programs).

To be taken up by the party *after* its formation are such questions as

other questions of the international situation, certain specific features of the various national questions in the U.S., the woman question, the character and history of the CPUSA, the tendencies of U.S. capital accumulation, the trade union question, and

¹⁵Many comrades think that since the Economists belittled theory from the right, *all* belittling of theory is rightist. Even a clear statement of this proposition makes its logical fallacy apparent.

For works discussing "left" disdain for theory and preoccupation with "action," see p. 8, fn. 6, above.

strategy for revolution in the U.S. . . .¹⁶

We think that an organization which agrees generally on party-building line should be formed to implement that line, but that a Leninist party needs much more than what the P.U.L. lists here. The P.U.L. omits too many questions of political line, of the *content* of what a party must teach the workers. What kind of united work can it do if some of its members insist that calling for the right of self-determination for the Black Belt South is mandatory, while others are sure that under present conditions it is chauvinist? Is it a matter of indifference what the party press says about NATO? Can half of the new party criticize but support the next Sadlowski, while half opposes him? Or must we all remain silent? Or are these things to be settled by the leading body, or by majority vote, soon after party-formation, without an opportunity for the study and struggle which they deserve?

The P.U.L. has so little confidence in the ability of the most consistent Marxist-Leninists to do our theoretical work that it has stepped into the right opportunist trap of saying that we must have "unity," and the consequent expansion of our forces, at the price of compromise on principle. They may not be all that attached to this line, since at least once their text on conditions for party-formation refers instead to "communist unification in a Party or other organizational form."¹⁷ So perhaps they will recognize that there are other organizational forms, short of the democratic-centralist party, that are appropriate when we have unity on our immediate party-building tasks but not programmatic unity. But if, at the point where the level of line agreement that they describe has been reached, they persisted in pushing for unification into a democratic-centralist party, we do not see how they could do so without relying on classic arguments that belittle the significance of important theoretical differences.

This position's denial of the necessity for theoretical work essential in the pre-party period is discussed more thoroughly in Chapter IV's exploration of the unity needed in a party. But here we must take up the other prong of the comrades' argument, for the P.U.L.'s position is based on an extremely unambitious, or rather defeatist, view of our *ability* to solve major questions of program and strategy before formation of a party. (We take up several of the arguments in some detail, because the line of mainly postponing theoretical work until after the formation of a party is in fact very influential. The P.U.L. puts forward the strongest arguments for that position that we have seen.¹⁸

We should say from the start that we agree that the party form of organization permits communists to do more and better theoretical work than more primitive forms. The fact remains, however, that much of that work must

¹⁶P.U.L., pp. 200-01, 204, 216-18.

¹⁷Ibid., p. 216.

¹⁸Ibid., pp. 201-04. Note that the P.U.L. considers it wrong to form a party unless it really is *the* party uniting the scattered and divided forces of the communist movement (pp. 88-91). On the one hand, the low level of line unity which they propose makes the idea of all joining a single party at least more feasible; but the demand for such unification before taking up the deferred questions still implies a *very* long delay before they are addressed.

be done before a *politically reliable* party can be formed, both to put our unity on a solid footing and to win over workers who will help us unite. So the problem is to devise ways of overcoming the obstacles to doing such work now, rather than to absolutize them.

On strategy and tactics, they hold that, before we have a party, line on such questions must “confine itself mainly to the reaffirmation of strategic and tactical principles as applied to the U.S.” They argue that many important questions cannot be decided in the absence of a mass upsurge, without which the questions are not even before us. We agree that hypothetical questions should not be a focus for debate or used to keep our forces divided. But does this category really include questions of strategy—e.g., whom does the proletariat unite with; whom does it seek to neutralize; whom must it oppose; are there regions of the country where the people must first pass through a new democratic revolution? Surely a Marxist analysis of class forces has never had to wait until a period of mass upsurge, although obviously one of our means of developing that analysis is to study what has been the political behavior of the different classes and strata in periods when they were in dramatic motion.

On tactics, are we unable to decide now whether communists should focus their own work and the work of the most developed workers in the trade union movement, or whether we should pull the few workers we may have in each plant into a Fightback or National United Workers’ Organization so we can feel like we are leading a mass movement? Are communists unable to settle the question of whether we should make use of bourgeois congressional elections to put forward our views?

The P.U.L. supports their position with an incontestible quotation from Lenin: “a correct revolutionary theory. . . assumes final shape only in close connection with the practical activity of a truly mass and truly revolutionary movement.” Other readers might (correctly) interpret the reference to “final shape” to mean that, at an earlier time, we can produce a basically correct revolutionary theory that is not yet in final shape, particularly if they read the sentences which the P.U.L. omits. In fact, Lenin pointed out that a correct revolutionary theory helps us create the class consciousness of the vanguard, build the party’s links to the masses, and provide correct leadership to the mass struggle. *Then* he added that the theory that performs these functions will get its “final shape” in connection with a mass revolutionary movement.¹⁹ So, unlike the P.U.L., Lenin obviously thought (and showed) that much of the theory can be developed in advance and brought to the upsurge when that upsurge takes place.

Can the theory be developed earlier and tested, in part, through study of many different local experiences in mass struggles? Not only did Lenin speak as if it had been, but a glance at the *History of the CPSU(B)* [*Communist Party of the Soviet Union (Bolshevik)*] shows that among the ideological struggles which preceded formation of a party were those on such questions of strategy and tactics as the proletariat’s relationship to the peasantry, its relationship to the liberal bourgeoisie, and forms of mass work (widespread economic and

¹⁹“Left-Wing” Communism—An Infantile Disorder, LCW 31: 24-25.

political agitation, or tailing the trade-union struggle).

The P.U.L. also argues that "it is hard to speak of a proletarian political line," since political line guides the independent political struggle of the working class "in the field," and we are not only not guiding such a struggle but lack the general staff (the party) that will. But why can we not develop such a line before we are in a position to implement it?²⁰ First the P.U.L. says, "The working out of a battle plan rests on a force capable of analyzing the theater of operations, the enemy's fortifications, and the strength of the people's militia." (The context makes it clear that this "force" can only be the party, the "general staff.") The military metaphor makes the reader think of times of revolutionary upsurge, when we need a party that can rapidly analyze the state and motion of all the class forces in the country to make immediate tactical decisions on critical moves. Thus the metaphor obscures the question of why it would take a whole party to map out the general strategy for the revolution and the overall tactics for current conditions. Lenin and Mao both made such analyses of the revolutionary paths for their societies without having that kind of organization to assist them. Instead, they did what they could through reading, correspondence, travel, talks with people, and participation in the practical struggle, to learn about conditions throughout their countries.

The comrades also quote Stalin's statement that, until the 1905 revolution in Russia, before which the party was not able to lead a truly mass movement, the Russian Social-Democratic Labor Party's "strategy. . . was necessarily narrow and restricted," and its tactics "were also necessarily narrow and without scope." But this refers to the *implementation* of strategy and tactics. This time the P.U.L. gives us enough of the quotation to refute their own argument, since they also include the sentence: "The Party confined itself to mapping the movement's strategic plan, i.e., the route that the movement should take. . ."

Finally,²¹ the P.U.L. argues that "the real implications of any strategic or tactical positions will only emerge through their implementation on a wide scale under a centralized direction," although they concede that "[j]oint ideological struggle will doubtless clarify some of these differences." Since a line cannot be proven correct or incorrect until implemented in practice, we should not let disagreements over lines not tested by a party divide us: "[D]ifferences over a comprehensive strategy and tactics should not have decisive importance in the struggle for communist unity." This position disregards the extent to which many issues have been proven by the experience of the proletariat elsewhere, and it ignores our ability to sum up experiences of different groups trying different lines in this country (and the possibility of forming a pre-party organization to do this). The logical

²⁰One wonders how the P.U.L. thinks communists can *get into* a position to implement a correct line. The working class will follow communist leadership not because it knows that communists are supposed to be the general staff, but because it will have learned, through experience, that the communists largely do have the answers on how to conduct the proletarian class struggle.

²¹We have omitted some of their points which are secondary and, in our opinion, easily refuted.

consequence of such a view is that it is better for all communists to unite in one party and implement a disastrous strategy in a united way (if such a strategy happens to be favored by a majority of leadership), and then learn from our experience and rectify our mistakes, better this than for separate lines to be tested by different parties so that a more correct one can be proven simultaneously.

The P.U.L. is putting unity above all, a right error. And it is relieving us of the necessity of struggling to develop strategy and tactics by underestimating our ability to do so under present conditions, again a form of the rightist's conservatism and lack of initiative.

Similarly, they limit the needed programmatic unity to "a rough program" which "must largely content itself with summarizing the level of unity achieved in the ideological struggle for party-formation." This is because, they say, a more developed program depends on wide-scale social investigation, and such investigation requires actual participation in the class struggle. We agree on the need for social investigation, and that practice is a part of it. In the next two chapters we will consider the views of the P.U.L., and many others, who hold that a substantial commitment to such practice and the gathering of the knowledge gained in the course of it can come only after formation of a party. Here we only point out that in 1899 Lenin called for Russian Marxists to struggle over the points of a party program and he put forward a draft, and that at the 1903 Congress which formed a united RSDLP (Russian Social-Democratic Labour Party) a detailed program was adopted.²² (Throughout this book we raise such historical examples not because we think that U.S. communists must mimic past experiences, but because so many comrades have convinced themselves through pure reason that we cannot do various things without a party, in the face of historical experience which disproves their reasoning.)

It is correct to raise the question of what is knowable before we unite in a party and to consider the questions on which disagreements are tolerable. This is what Lenin called "introduction of the programme question into the polemic," since it is precisely the program which states the points on which party members must agree.²³ It is certainly correct to oppose exploitation of every difference as a "line of demarcation," but the P.U.L.'s struggle against the "left" line takes them to the right. We think that to unite in a centralized Leninist party, Lenin's general description of a program is correct:

The programme must formulate our basic views, precisely establish our immediate political tasks; point out the immediate demands that must show the area of agitational activity; give unity to the agitational work, expand and deepen it, thus raising it from fragmentary partial agitation for petty, isolated demands to the status of agitation for the sum total of Social-Democratic [communist] demands.²⁴

²²See *History of the CPSU(B)*, pp. 37-41, which also states that the program remained in force until 1919. (However, Lenin proposed major revisions in 1917.) See also LCW 4: 227-54.

²³"A Draft Programme of Our Party," LCW 4: 231.

²⁴*Ibid.*, p. 230.

The Chinese formed a party without such a clear program, but it was a much looser organization than the RSDLP or what we need here to do consistent work in educating and organizing the working class. Without such a program, as we pointed out above, the party must either keep silent or speak with different voices on many important issues.

The forces to do the theoretical work which our movement requires do exist. Many comrades shrink from these tasks and consign them to a future when "the party can do them." But "the party" can neither unite many of today's communists nor win over many workers without significant progress in accomplishing these tasks. Lenin and Mao, while not perfect, certainly showed that even a single person who combines tremendous intellect, unflagging energy, a firm grasp of Marxism, and close ties to the masses and their movement can, in concert with a few comrades, play a tremendous part in analyzing their societies and charting the revolutionary path. Our movement has yet to produce such leaders, but the combined work of a number of people can lead to a qualitative leap in the application of science to an analysis of the U.S. None of us can do it alone, but we can do it in an organization that divides some of the labor and permits the nationwide exchange of the lessons of practice and social investigation.

HOW TO DO THEORETICAL WORK IN A PRE-PARTY NETWORK

The forces who would join such an organization are largely untrained in theoretical work. Doing that work will not be easy, especially at first, but it is not impossible, either. We will give two examples of what the process *might* look like. Our purpose, of course, is to provide illustrations, not a blueprint for the work of as-yet unknown forces.

First, let us say that the steering committee of a pre-party network, implementing the organization's unity on theoretical priorities, decides to organize work on a class analysis. It could coordinate the formation of a small working group, after local circles recommend individuals who have already done such work or at least whose research skills and grasp of dialectical materialism are thought to be well developed. The steering committee should see to it that the working group, though kept small, represents the main political tendencies that exist within the network.

We would expect the group to put together, and use, a study list of materials from "the classics" on classes and class analysis; frame the questions which a U.S. class analysis must answer; read analyses that have been written by Marxist-Leninists in other advanced capitalist countries; implement a division of labor for studying and reporting on relevant materials from bourgeois sources, Marxist academics, and other U.S. communist organizations; investigate the current outlook and behavior of different classes and strata (using, among other things, questionnaires sent to the circles in the network, to get their reports on what can be observed locally); and study relevant historical and current materials to be found in basic library research (concerning, for example, various ways members of the petty bourgeoisie have organized themselves, and acted, in the class struggle).

While original research will no doubt be essential, the working group certainly will not have to start from scratch. Lenin was able to write

Imperialism, the Highest Stage of Capitalism largely through critical analysis of bourgeois sources, i.e., using a great deal of their facts, those that are reliable, to inform a Marxist analysis. We will undoubtedly be able to do the same as we familiarize ourselves with the relevant literature. Moreover, there is a wealth of material being published all the time in many books and in journals such as *The Insurgent Sociologist* and the *Journal of Radical Political Economy* by Marxist academics and other left critics of capitalist society, material which communists are entirely incapable of studying, criticizing, and using, in our present state of fragmentation.

The class analysis working group should make periodic progress reports to the entire network, particularly at the beginning of each stage in its work, as plans are being drawn up, so that other comrades can contribute their suggestions.

If its ideological unity were unusually high, such a working group could produce a single report analyzing the various strata in U.S. society, and explaining their interests, their typical conduct and outlooks, and their predictable reactions to the deepening crisis of capitalism and the initiatives that will be taken by both the proletariat and the bourgeoisie. But it is quite likely that more than one such report will be produced and that a series of polemics will develop within the network. Such differences, and the need to resolve them through ideological struggle, are unavoidable among revolutionaries who are a product of bourgeois society, who bring different experiences to the movement, and who vary in their ability to embrace consistent Marxism-Leninism and resist opportunism. But at least the network will permit the study to be done and the debate to take place in an organized way, rather than leaving its members exposed to only one point of view or none at all. Unity on disputed questions will come in the only ways ever possible in political movements, as we move closer to the formation of a party: through ideological struggle ending the influence of the incorrect line (e.g., Lenin's defeat of Economism), a split at the time of party-formation (the Jewish Bund's leaving the RSDLP at the congress which constituted a real party), or the minority submitting itself to the majority on secondary issues (Lenin and others staying, when the same congress adopted a vague and incorrect formulation on party membership).

Theoretical projects less ambitious than a class analysis could be handled differently. Investigation and struggle over the forms and effects of various affirmative action programs, for example, might take place in the form of a few comrades' individual contributions to a debate in the network's theoretical journal. The network steering committee should provide some organization in the choice of questions to be taken up, using its authority to decide for what purposes the theoretical journal will be available at a particular time.

Again, nothing we say here, in suggesting how a pre-party network can organize theoretical work, is meant to obscure the fact that the party form of organization will permit us to do more and better theoretical work than more primitive forms. The fact remains, however, that much theoretical work is needed to unite communists into a party, as well as to deepen the fusion with the workers' movement that will also enhance our ability to unite around a correct line.

SUMMARY

Communists in this country face tremendous theoretical tasks that we should begin to take up in the pre-party period. This essential work means not only developing and struggling for general lines for carrying out trade union work, understanding the international situation, knowing what demands of the oppressed nationalities should be supported, etc. It also means analyzing fundamental questions concerning the obstacles to revolution in imperialist countries and what can be learned from apparent weaknesses in the internal party life and the internationalist perspectives of parties in the international communist movement for many years past. And this theoretical work means intensive investigation of "the economic, financial, political, military, cultural and party activities of our enemies, our friends and ourselves" (Mao), the study of history to help illuminate these, and especially an analysis of the classes in this society and their relationship to each other.

How much of this work can be begun now and how fast it will proceed depends entirely on what forces combine for this and other party-building work, but priorities should be set to permit concurrent progress in the resolution of major programmatic controversies and in the development of propaganda that will improve our ability to bring worker-communists into the party-building process. Later in our work priority should also go to study that will help resolve questions of the internal functioning of a party.

Our lack of understanding of the issues identified above is a major barrier to our unity, to our ability to win workers to communism, and to our ability to chart the course of the revolution in this country. As we will explain later, we think that progress on the theoretical front is primary for moving all our work forward. But first we must consider communists' practical and organizational tasks.

III

Practical Tasks: Promoting Fusion, And Other Functions of Mass Work

In the realm of practice, too, the distinction between communists' tasks before and after the formation of a party is less distinct than a neat, schematic presentation would have it. On the one hand, as we show in Chapters IV and IX, the preconditions for successful adoption of the democratic-centralist party form do not *per se* include a specific degree of proletarian involvement in party-formation. Furthermore, the party form will permit communists to engage in much more effective practice, permitting a qualitative improvement in our ability to carry out the continuing work of building up a strong party that truly is the organization of the proletarian vanguard. On the other hand, failure to take up practical work in a serious way, as part of our party-building tasks now, would unnecessarily—and, therefore, inexcusably—delay our starting to transform the character of both the communist and workers' movements by promoting their fusion. Furthermore, as we explain in this chapter, such failure would sabotage our other party-building work, rendering us incapable of doing good theoretical work, making it substantially more difficult to settle differences among communists, and in general heightening the conditions in which petty-bourgeois deviations flourish.

There are major disagreements in the communist movement about the extent to which we can engage in mass work in this period and about how broad that work should be. In our view, comrades should engage in as much practical work as we can while still devoting sufficient attention to our theoretical and organizational tasks, keeping in mind the primacy of overcoming the communist movement's theoretical weaknesses. This is a vague formulation, but as a general orientation it will lead to different results than the work of those who devote almost all their resources to practice (out of right or "left" justifications)(e.g., CPML, R.C.P., many local groups) and those who tend to see practice mainly as a distraction from the real work of party-building (the "Revolutionary Wing"/U.S. Leninist Core, some small circles, apparently Irwin Silber).

On the breadth of that work, we think that communists should concentrate our forces in the struggles of the industrial proletariat and also key mining sectors, selecting locations, industries, and plants where the factors are most

favorable for workers' receptivity to revolutionary socialism.¹ In this chapter we argue that communists must pay particular attention to working closely with the most progressive and active workers who come forward. We must try to raise their political level, obtain their assistance in our broader mass work, learn from them, and—for those who are ready to be taught scientific socialism—win them over to communism. At the same time, we argue, communists must try to organize and educate the broad masses in those plants where we concentrate. It is incorrect to either keep all work at the level of the broad masses or to zero in on propaganda to the relatively few workers who today are interested in learning about communism.

In explaining this position, we cover several topics:

- (1) the separation of the communist and workers' movements and the need to help create a communist workers' movement;
- (2) the roles of agitation and propaganda in creating such a movement;
- (3) the relationship between practical work among the broad proletarian masses and the formation of a proletarian vanguard (a sizable group of active socialist workers, with some real leaders among them) and winning it to communism;
- (4) other ways in which practice promotes our party-building tasks; and
- (5) whether practice *is* party-building.

It is impossible to discuss these topics adequately without also attempting to penetrate the confusion that prevails in our movement about how to use the terms *advanced*, *intermediate*, and *backward* in describing strata in the working class; and in a digression we make such an attempt. Furthermore, for many communists, an objective appraisal of the relationship between propaganda and agitation is impossible because they understand certain quotations to give propaganda a preeminent role during party-building. The quotations have been totally misinterpreted, and a fictitious Russian party-building history has been constructed around them. However, since many comrades were never "taught" this misinformation, we have placed our criticism of it in an appendix.

THE NEED TO FUSE COMMUNISM WITH THE WORKERS' MOVEMENT

Revolutionary theory and communist organization alone do not make a revolution. The vanguard party can be neither an elite sect trying to manipulate the rebellious passions of the masses, nor an organization merely trying to service the mass movement as it develops spontaneously. Nor can it just be in the vanguard intellectually; it must be an organization of revolutionary communist workers, the vanguard of their class, and it must become the actual leader of the millions of workers in this country.

¹We have seen no thorough investigation of strata in the U.S. working class, but we would expect each of the following to be a favorable condition: large numbers of workers concentrated in the workplace; low pay and poor working conditions, rather than the state of relative privilege that imperialist superprofits permit some industrial workers to achieve; location in a heavily industrialized urban area; a history of struggle in the area or in the union; the industry being strategic (i.e., at the heart of the economy); and high national minority composition of the workforce.

Today's communists are not even close to this description. The number of workers who look to any communist forces for an understanding of an economic or political question, or for leadership in struggles against exploitation and oppression, is miniscule. The communists and other socialists of this country are overwhelmingly ex-students and other people of petty bourgeois backgrounds. We came to Marxism-Leninism from the anti-war/student movement, the Black and other national liberation movements, and the liberation support movement. There is a small but growing workers' movement, but today it is a movement for militant unionism, for union democracy, and for organization of unorganized plants, not a movement for socialism. In Europe, millions of workers vote for the parties that they think will bring them socialism; workers here are not in love with capitalism, but they overwhelmingly believe that no better system has been developed anywhere else.

These blunt truths are sobering, but they are no reason for pessimism. The development of a revolutionary proletarian socialist movement has to proceed step by step. Lenin long ago explained why, and he described experiences that began as ours has begun. Describing the tremendous strike movement of the 1890's in Russia, he wrote,

Taken by themselves, these strikes were simply trade union struggles, not yet Social-Democratic struggles. They marked the awakening antagonisms between workers and employers; but the workers were not, and could not be, conscious of the irreconcilable antagonism of their interests to the whole of the modern political and social system, i.e., theirs was not yet Social-Democratic consciousness. . . .

We have said that *there could not have been* Social-Democratic consciousness among the workers. It would have to be brought to them from without. The history of all countries shows that the working class, exclusively by its own effort, is able to develop only trade-union consciousness, i.e., the conviction that it is necessary to combine in unions, fight the employers, and strive to compel the government to pass necessary labour legislation, etc. The theory of socialism, however, grew out of the philosophic, historical, and economic theories elaborated by educated representatives of the propertied classes, by intellectuals. . . .

Hence, [in Russia,] we had both the spontaneous awakening of the working masses, their awakening to conscious life and conscious struggle, and a revolutionary youth, armed with Social-Democratic theory and straining towards the workers.¹

Elsewhere Lenin described the necessity for these two movements to merge:

At first socialism and the working-class movement existed separately in all the European countries. The workers struggled against the capitalists, they organized strikes and unions, while the socialists stood aside from the working-class movement, formulated doctrines criticising the contemporary capitalist, bourgeois system of society and demanding its replacement by another system, the higher, socialist system. The separation of the working-class movement and socialism gave rise to weakness and underdevelopment in each: the theories of the socialists, unfused with the workers' struggles, remained nothing more than utopias, good wishes that had no effect on real life; the working-class movement remained petty, fragmented, and did not acquire political significance, was not enlightened by the advanced science of its time. For this reason we see in all European countries a

¹ *What is to be Done?*, LCW 5: 375-76 (footnote omitted).

constantly growing urge to *fuse* socialism with the working-class movement in a single *Social-Democratic* movement. When this fusion takes place the class struggle of the workers becomes *the conscious struggle of the proletariat* to emancipate itself from exploitation by the propertied classes, it is evolved into a higher form of the socialist workers' movement—the *independent working-class Social-Democratic party*. By directing socialism towards a fusion with the working-class movement, Karl Marx and Frederick Engels did their greatest service: they created a revolutionary theory that explained the necessity for this fusion and gave socialists the task of organizing the class struggle of the proletariat.

Precisely this is what happened in Russia. In Russia, too, socialism has been in existence for a long time, for many decades, *standing aside* from the struggle of the workers against the capitalists, aside from the workers' strikes, etc. On the one hand, the socialists did not understand Marx's theory, they thought it inapplicable to Russia; on the other, the Russian working-class movement remained in a purely embryonic form. . . . However, the Russian socialists did not hold to their undeveloped fallacious theory. They went forward, accepted Marx's teaching, and evolved a theory of workers' socialism applicable to Russia—the theory of the Russian Social-Democrats. . . . Since the foundation of Russian Social-Democracy (1883) the Russian working-class movement—in each of its broader manifestations—has been drawing closer to the Russian Social-Democrats in an effort to merge with them. The founding of the Russian Social-Democratic Labour Party (in the spring of 1898) marked the biggest step forward towards this fusion. At the present time the *principal* task for all Russian socialists and all class-conscious workers is to strengthen this fusion, consolidate and organize the Social-Democratic Labour Party. He who does not wish to recognize this fusion, he who tries to draw some sort of artificial line of demarcation between the working-class movement and Social-Democracy in Russia renders no services but does *harm* to workers' socialism and the working-class movement in Russia.²

In this country it is not that there is no history of socialist ideas being brought to the working class before now. But the weaknesses of the old CPUSA, its revisionist degeneration, the bourgeoisie's consistent and professional propaganda of reformism and anti-communism, the overall failure of Marxist-Leninists (and other socialists) to overcome that bourgeois ideology, and the spread of relative privileges among many workers, have created a situation where fusion remains very low.

Some comrades think that those of us who consider the level of fusion in the United States low today are like those in Russia who tried to hold the work back, because they did "not wish to recognize this fusion." None of the existing parties gives any public recognition of the fact that we have a long way to go in fusing communism with the workers' movement, but only the MLOC, now renamed the CPUSA/M-L, has tried to defend such a position.

The CPUSA/M-L's views are mainly explained in a few paragraphs in the February, 1977, issue of *Unite!*. The comrades oppose "the Trotskyist formulation of fusion as the combining of the 'communist movement with the working class movement'" by convincing themselves that there is never any separation of the two movements to overcome:

²A *Retrograde Trend in Russian Social-Democracy*, LCW 4: 257-59.

Communists are part of the working-class movement—there exists no separate communist movement which must be fused with the working class.

All social movements are based on a definite class. The working class movement—that part of the working class engaged in struggle against the capitalists—grows out of the working class as a whole. If there is a separate communist movement, then where does it grow from—either the proletariat, the petty-bourgeoisie, or the bourgeoisie. And if it is part of the proletariat then it cannot exist as a separate movement.³

And again: “. . . Marxist-Leninists do not exist separate from the working class movement. . . .” Of course no communists who understand and apply Marxism *remain* apart from the workers’ movement any longer than it takes them to apply their theoretical understanding and learn from experience, so that their forces merge with the vanguard of the workers’ movement. This process, when it does take place, includes the better non-proletarian communists overcoming many of their weaknesses and the best of the workers being won to communism. But to claim that there is never a separation because there *should* be no separation is sophistry. The main virtue of such reasoning is that it brings joy to the hearts of those who want to see *themselves* as part of the working-class movement, regardless of whether we are still in the period (described by that famous “Trotskyist” V.I. Lenin) when the socialists have yet to effectively fuse their activity with the working-class movement, and when that movement has little connection with socialism.

The CPUSA/M-L does say, “*The task of the party is to fuse scientific socialism with the spontaneous working class movement in the course of leading the day to day struggle of the workers against the capitalist class.*” Here, by speaking of socialism rather than the supposedly non-existent communist movement, they apparently mean that fusion means teaching the workers the socialist theory, while providing leadership to their struggles.⁴ With further elaboration, we would agree that this states the means of accomplishing fusion. Thus to a certain extent the CPUSA/M-L does recognize

³p. 7.

⁴Lenin, too, often wrote of fusing *socialism* with the workers’ movement, rather than of fusing the two movements. Elsewhere, however, he wrote of two movements. *A Retrograde Trend*. . . , LCW 4: 260; “Apropos of the *Profession de Foi*,” *ibid.*, 287-88; “Draft Declaration of the Editorial Board of *Iskra* and *Zarya*,” *ibid.*, 325.

The expression “fusing socialism with the workers’ movement” helps guard against “left” tendencies to ascribe real political significance to a communist movement that is not a communist workers’ movement, and right tendencies to see fusion as the integration of petty bourgeois communists into the proletariat without taking Marxism-Leninism to the class. But the other phrase, referring to the two movements, is useful as well, because in this country there is definitely a social movement of ex-students and other petty-bourgeois communists, along with a few workers. Though extremely weak politically, this movement is a separate social phenomenon, with its own origins, social composition, goals, and laws of development. Insisting, as some comrades have privately, that it is wrong to speak of fusing the communist and workers’ movements simply plays into the hands of forces like the CPUSA/M-L, who want to label Trotskyist all discussion of the relative isolation of this communist movement from the workers’ movement.

the need to develop communist influence within the class, and this is clear in other statements of theirs. They also talk about the need to recruit more working-class people into their organization. But they persist in minimizing these tasks by wiping out any distinction between those petty bourgeois and intellectual forces which first accept scientific socialism, and the workers whom we must both win over and integrate ourselves with politically to avoid being a petty bourgeois socialist movement. (And they ignore the danger of opportunism in their own organization, given its class base.) A graphic example, but not the only one, of their understating the work of fusion was in the same *Unite!* article. The authors referred to "the 'left' line which existed in the MLOC and the working class movement as a whole" and called for rectification "in the entire working class movement."⁵ The MLOC must have considered *itself* the workers' movement, for there are no rank-and-file workers' struggles in which the workers accepted (or ever considered) the allegedly "left" line on fusion which the MLOC repudiated.

Ironically, the CPUSA/M-L claims that those of us who call for fusing the communist movement with the workers' movement are Trotskyists who see the party as an elite petty-bourgeois group which will effectively exercise its dictatorship over the masses. In fact, those of us who recognize the separation of communists from the workers' movement, *in order to make and implement plans to end that separation*, are far less likely to make that deviation than those communists from the petty bourgeoisie who decide that they *are* the working-class movement.

The degree of fusion is, of course, a factual question, and a small collective in the San Francisco Bay Area cannot claim to have an overview of the answer. But if communist influence on the workers' movement were substantially higher elsewhere than the very low level here, we think we would see some objective evidence of the fact. It would show in the demands put forward by the workers.⁶ Such influence would also be manifest in communists' ability to really mobilize the workers. For example, do those who think that fusion is high believe that the U.S. debate over the Theory of Three Worlds will determine whether the working class will, in the near future, oppose or support the strengthening of NATO? Another indicator of substantial communist influence on the workers' movement would be a much higher level of systematic red-baiting and outright persecution by the top union hierarchy and the state, tactics that will surely be applied with a vengeance as communists become more of a threat. Furthermore, there are few, if any, workers at communist forums held in this area, and other comrades report that the same is true elsewhere. And we can be sure that if any of the existing parties had recruited many workers, they would have found ways to advertise that fact, but they have not done so. Finally, although this is not the place to prove it, we think that there is a great deal of evidence in the political lines and in the form

⁵*Unite!*, 2/77, p. 10 (emphasis omitted).

⁶Not that the entire class, in its mass organizations, must be putting forward socialist demands, but at least those who are most progressive and are the activists in a workers' movement would be doing so if that movement had fused with socialism.

of the agitation and propaganda of the existing parties to show that they have had difficulty changing the petty-bourgeois composition of their organizations. There are too many, and too consistent, mistakes that only groups of the revolutionary petty bourgeoisie and intelligentsia could persist in for long. (E.g., so many parties' "left" sectarian attitudes towards other communists; dozens of MLOC or CPUSA/M-L articles that fail to explain carefully why the bourgeois or reformist answer to a particular political question is false.)

The MLOC did at one point treat the level of fusion as a question of fact, rather than something to be dealt with solely by reasoning that communists "do not exist separate from the working-class movement." For they wrote,

...[T]he level of socialist influence in the working class movement is at a high level, as indicated in the analysis of the state of the working class movement in COMMUNIST LINE #3. ...[The MLOC's former erroneous view that fusion is at a low level] saw fusion as a question of the presence or existence of communists in the working class, rather than the fusing of scientific socialism with the workers movement, which has been taking place for 125 years through various forms and is today at a relatively high level.⁷

As far as we know, no statements of the MLOC's on fusion go farther than this in presenting *evidence* of a high level of fusion. Recall what a high level of fusion really is: "When this fusion takes place, the class struggle of the workers becomes *the conscious struggle of the proletariat* to emancipate itself from exploitation by the propertied classes. . . ." ⁸ The MLOC's short proof that socialist influence among the workers is high is difficult to take seriously. First, *there is no analysis of the state of the U.S. working class movement in Communist Line #3*. The journal contains only a series of reprinted Albanian articles on general theoretical questions. Maybe the comrades thought no one would go back to check on their "analysis."

Second, how can one possibly contrast "the fusing of scientific socialism with the workers movement" to the "existence of communists in the working class"? What form can fusion take, other than the development of a significant number of communist workers? Or does socialist thought just sort of drift through the workers' movement, filling the spaces between the human bodies?

Finally, the reference to 125 years of fusion shows a mentality which aims to obscure questions, not answer them. The bourgeoisie has promoted *its* ideology for three times as long, relying on far greater resources than we have, and—in this country—displaying more professionalism and a great deal more consistency. The question of the influence of each ideology on the class at this point cannot be solved by counting the years since Marxist thought reached North America.

The MLOC came up with one last argument on fusion, one that is not peculiar to them. They discovered that all one has to do is form a party, and the level of fusion leaps:

⁷Op. cit., p. 10.

⁸Lenin, quoted above, p. 35.

The level of class conscious struggle on the part of the working class is expressed in many ways, but the most important expression is the existence of the political party of the working class, the communist party.

...[T]he formation of a vanguard party is a reflection of the fusion that exists. The formation and development of the communist party is a very high expression of this fusion between Marxism-Leninism and the working class movement.⁹

Now this might have a ring of authenticity because of its close similarity to what Lenin said about the forming of the RSDLP (see quotation on p. 35, above). But the founding of the *Russian* party was such a tremendous step towards fusion because it was largely communist workers who formed themselves into a party.¹⁰ No doubt organizing our present forces into a unified party, with a correct line, would greatly increase our *ability* to deepen fusion. But the task would still have barely begun if those forces came mainly from non-proletarian strata and were only beginning to establish our ties with the workers.

No, comrades of the CPUSA/M-L, the task of fusing communism with the workers' movement remains very great. And your resort to such flimsy arguments, instead of facts, to prove otherwise strengthens our opinion that the facts do not accord with your wishes. We emphasize the magnitude of the work that faces communists in deepening fusion not because we shrink from that work, but to make sure that communists give it the kind of attention which we must give to a task that we have mainly failed at so far, instead of deluding ourselves about having a high level of influence on the class, or even about *being* the working-class movement.

Such delusions and pretensions do have real consequences. They lead to underestimating our tasks; producing agitation and propaganda that "skips ahead" of the audience's capacity to grasp the material's correctness; obscuring the especially serious need for criticism/self-criticism and for members to engage in a prolonged struggle to remold their outlooks, in any group that is basically petty-bourgeois; and encouraging unfounded confidence in a general line and style of work that have yet to be proven in practice. Furthermore, training communists to evaluate fusion, or any serious question, in a subjective way will inevitably erode their ability to analyze other problems objectively.

There *are* forces in this country that can mobilize at least some tens of thousands of workers, sometimes many times that, when they want to: the churches, the Democratic Party, the trade union bureaucrats, the right-wing opposition to gun control, etc. Today we have but a small fraction of the influence of the least of these. Tomorrow, as part of a strong proletarian revolutionary movement, we will overwhelm them all, but only if we discover how to do so, on the basis of an objective assessment of where we are now.

⁹*Unite!*, 9/77, p. 10.

¹⁰See *A Retrograde Trend*. . . , LCW 4: 257-60, and "Disruption of Unity Under Cover of Outcries for Unity," LCW 20: 343.

HOW TO DEEPEN FUSION

Communists agree that the way to increase our influence in the working class, and increase the working-class influence on the communist organizations and circles, is to take our ideas to the workers. But here the agreement ends. There are serious disputes about the relative importance of propaganda, agitation, and providing practical leadership in the workers' struggles; about the attention to be given to workers who are at different levels of development; and about how much we should participate in struggles outside those where workers face their employers.

A large section of the movement believes that the way to fuse communism with the workers' movement is to "win over the advanced workers," making propaganda "the chief form of our work." Some comrades use this as a "left" justification for doing high-level "revolutionary" propaganda and ignoring necessary but difficult work among the broad masses. Others use it to justify fear of trying to lead the masses, as part of an overall right line. Still others, perhaps the majority, do their best at combining broad mass work with additional forms that will help raise the level of the most developed workers, but they still drag themselves away from a clear conception of our tasks by hanging on to these slogans, which are wrong.

Before examining the errors, it is necessary to enter the debate over the definitions of some important terms.

Strata Among the Workers, and Fusion

In an 1899 manuscript, Lenin argued that the Russian Marxists should devote an important part of their educational materials (a national newspaper) to the most politically and intellectually developed Russian workers. In his article Lenin described three strata in the working class, which in Russia had gone through a strike movement that reverberated in all of society, and which had been exposed to the ideas of socialism for several years. We quote the key passage about these strata in full, because it is influential in discussions of fusion in this country. We have italicized the portions which describe, in general terms, the strata that sooner or later emerge in every capitalist country.

The history of the working-class movement in all countries shows that the better-situated strata of the working class respond to the ideas of socialism more rapidly and more easily. From among these come, in the main *the advanced workers that every working-class movement brings to the fore, those who can win the confidence of the labouring masses, who devote themselves entirely to the education and organization of the proletariat, who accept socialism consciously, and who even elaborate independent socialist theories.* Every viable working-class movement has brought to the fore *such working-class leaders*, its own Proudhons, Vaillants, Weitlings, and Bebels. And our Russian working-class movement promises not to lag behind the European movement in this respect. At a time when educated society is losing interest in honest, illegal literature, an impassioned desire for knowledge and for socialism is growing among the workers, *real heroes are coming to the fore from amongst the workers*, who, despite their wretched living conditions, despite the stultifying penal servitude of factory labour, possess so

much character and will-power that *they study, study, study*, and turn themselves into conscious Social-Democrats—"the working-class intelligentsia."¹¹ This "*working-class intelligentsia*" already exists in Russia, and we must make every effort to ensure that its ranks are regularly reinforced, that its lofty mental requirements are met and that leaders of the Russian Social-Democratic Labour Party come from its ranks. The newspaper that wants to become the organ of all Russian Social-Democrats must, therefore, be at the level of the advanced workers; not only must it not lower its level artificially, but, on the contrary, it must raise it constantly, it must follow up all the tactical, political, and theoretical problems of world Social-Democracy. Only then will the demands of the working-class intelligentsia be met, and it itself will take the cause of the Russian workers and, consequently [Lenin's emphasis], the cause of the Russian revolution, into its own hands.

After the numerically small stratum of advanced workers comes *the broad stratum of average workers*. These workers, too, *strive ardently for socialism, participate in workers' study circles, read socialist newspapers and books, participate in agitation, and differ from the preceding stratum only in that they cannot become fully independent leaders of the Social-Democratic working-class movement*. The average worker will not understand some of the articles in a newspaper that aims to be the organ of the Party, he will not be able to get a full grasp of an intricate theoretical or practical problem. This does not at all mean that the newspaper must lower itself to the level of the mass of its readers. The newspaper, on the contrary, must raise their level and help promote advanced workers from the middle stratum of workers. *Such workers, absorbed by local* [Lenin's emphasis] *practical work and interested mainly in the events of the working-class movement and the immediate problems of agitation*, should connect their every act with the thoughts of the entire Russian working-class movement, its historical task, and the ultimate goal of socialism, so that the newspaper, the mass of whose readers are average workers, must connect socialism and the political struggle with every local and narrow question.

Lastly, behind the stratum of average workers comes *the mass that constitutes the lower strata of the proletariat*. It is quite possible that a socialist newspaper will be completely or well-nigh incomprehensible to them (even in Western Europe the number of Social-Democratic voters is much larger than the number of readers of Social-Democratic newspapers), but it would be absurd to conclude from this that the newspaper of the Social-Democrats should adapt itself to the lowest possible level of the workers. The only thing that follows from this is that *different forms of agitation and propaganda must be brought to bear on these strata—pamphlets written in more popular language, oral agitation, and chiefly—leaflets on local events*. The Social-Democrats should not confine themselves even to this; it is quite possible that the first steps towards arousing the consciousness of the lower strata of the workers will have to take the form of legal educational activities.¹²

Current literature generally substitutes the terms *intermediate* and *backward* for *average* and *lower strata*, respectively. We adopt this usage as well. It is clear from the context that the word translated as "average" does

¹¹This particular sentence obviously describes a process then happening in Russia. Those who have the qualities of the advanced would only be becoming conscious Marxist-Leninists in conditions where communism is the socialist trend which they are being encouraged to study.

¹²*A Retrograde Trend*. . . , LCW 4: 280-82.

not mean average in the sense of “the norm,” since “the broad stratum of average workers” is evidently much smaller than the “mass that constitutes the lower strata.”¹³ Furthermore, it is clear from other statements of Lenin’s, emphasizing the importance of widespread agitation to win workers over to the views of the communists, that the lower strata, non-socialist workers were an important part of the working class and that it could not be said that the typical worker was an active socialist.^{14, 15} As for the remaining workers, Lenin elsewhere refers to them as “backward,” and we adopt this term as both more convenient and, for reasons we explain below, more descriptive than *lower strata*.

If communists decide to adhere to these definitions today, as we think they should, the person considered an advanced worker would probably be leading a rank-and-file caucus, a committee to organize a union in an unorganized plant, or perhaps a community struggle against, say, police brutality. Such a person would read all the socialist literature he or she could find, trying to grasp and answer the burning questions facing the movement, including the more theoretical aspects. The worker would be trying to link up with people with like-minded views. At forums and other places he or she would encourage the communists (or whatever socialists to whom the worker gravitated) to “get their act together” and would state some views on how to do it. In practice, the advanced worker would stand out not only as a respected organizer, but as one who tries to teach fellow-workers the need for socialism. Such a worker would not be difficult to identify: his or her name would come up quickly in conversations with other workers about struggles in the plant or union. We assume that a few such workers must exist in the U.S. today. But local experience, other comrades’ reports, and the evidence concerning fusion cited earlier in this chapter make it clear that there are only a few, certainly not enough to significantly affect the character of the struggles of the proletariat as a whole.

There are undoubtedly more of what Lenin called intermediate workers. These are activists in the class struggle who believe in socialism and would help in any systematic effort to promote it. Left alone, however, their activism and interests usually remain limited to struggles in their own plants and unions. Their contributions to the movements they participate in are invaluable, but they are not the real mass leaders that advanced workers are. Though not “working-class intellectuals,” they read socialist newspapers and books if given the opportunity.

¹³As the reader may know, *strata* is the plural of *stratum*.

¹⁴See, e.g., “Left-Wing” Communism—an Infantile Disorder, LCW 31: 52-54, 58-59; “Apropos of the *Profession de Foi*,” LCW 4: 288, 291-92; *What is to be Done?*, LCW 5: 428-29, 454, 471 (“Are there not advanced people, ‘average people,’ and ‘masses’ among the intelligentsia too?”).

¹⁵We refer to “socialist” workers, rather than “communists” in contexts where the issue is not whether the workers are *scientific* socialists, revolutionary Marxist-Leninists, but whether they favor socialism at all. Similarly, “socialist agitation” that helps bring workers closer to socialism could come from, e.g., communists, the CPUSA (by accident), or the S.W.P.

The third category, if we choose to apply these definitions to the U.S., would apply to so many workers that it will also be necessary to define some sub-categories, to guide our practice. For the group of backward, non-socialist workers is obviously the vast majority and runs all the way from active trade unionists who promote the interests of their fellow workers and who can be stimulated to learn about socialism, to died-in-the-wool reactionary, racist, and chauvinist members of the labor aristocracy. We usually describe the group of workers described first in the previous sentence as "progressive activists," but comparison of nationwide observations concerning the various strata of backward workers will probably produce more scientific sub-categories.

For years there has been disagreement about whether to apply the terms *advanced*, etc., as Lenin did, or to lower the level that each term refers to because conditions here have produced so few "Retrograde Trend" advanced and intermediate workers. Everyone seems to consider this an easy question, because they say but a few words on the subject. Unfortunately, this has not settled the issue, and each answer appears self-evident to its own adherents to this day. The continuing controversy, combined with the fact that this seeming debate over semantics has important implications for practice, requires us to take up the issue in some detail.

It is incorrect to see this as a question of whether we must automatically "stand with Lenin's definition"¹⁶ or redefine the term because concrete conditions have changed. A decision on how to use a word should be based on what best serves our need for theoretical clarity on the subject to which the word applies. Clarity, not just dogmatism, requires using the word as Lenin did, because the context of the discussion is the same as Lenin's, and our movement frequently relies on Lenin's concepts about the advanced and the role they play. It is important to make sure that we are talking about the same kind of people Lenin was, when we turn to him for lessons about what we can expect from such workers.

Those who disagree are generally against "dogmatically impos[ing] Lenin's description of an advanced worker in 1899 Russia on to today's situation without taking into account the differences in development of both the working class and communist movement as well as the state of fusion."¹⁷ Such dogmatism is often thought to cause comrades to "set off in search of the 'advanced'—not the advanced workers of the U.S. proletariat, of course, but the advanced workers of books."¹⁸ Comrades who hold these views often provide their own descriptions of those they consider to be the most developed workers in the U.S.¹⁹

¹⁶Communist Workers Group, *Forward*, #3.

¹⁷*Workers Viewpoint Journal*, #4, p. 2.

¹⁸P.U.L., p. 55.

¹⁹E.g., W.V.O., op. cit.; Philadelphia Workers' Organizing Committee, *Party-Building: Against Revisionism and Dogmatism*, p. 4; Committee for a Proletarian Party, *Principles of Unity*, pp. 2-3.

The Workers Congress argues for no definition at all, promoting a set of relative concepts in which we must look for "the advanced, intermediate, and backward" of "every situation." *The Communist*, 8/28/76, pp. 5 & 8.

Yet these comrades invariably adopt Lenin's view that "advanced workers" play a central role in fusion, despite the fact that they are not talking about such workers as those of whom Lenin spoke. "It is the advanced who will constitute the key bridge between the communist movement and the working-class movement." "[T]hey. . . determine the character and level of the workers' movement."²⁰ Now it is obvious that fusion will be much greater when conditions produce a significant stratum of workers "who can win the confidence of the labouring masses, who devote themselves entirely to the education and organization of the proletariat, who accept socialism consciously" and can "become fully independent leaders of the Social-Democratic working-class movement" (Lenin). For these will be people who have the dedication, breadth of vision, intellectual development, and leadership skills to have an extraordinary influence on the masses of workers. (Lenin observed that "the advanced workers, as always and everywhere, determined the character of the movement, and they were followed by the working masses because they showed their readiness and their ability to serve the cause of the working class, because they proved able to win the full confidence of the masses."²¹) They will also facilitate the merging of the two movements by their effect on the communist organizations which they join, since, as Lenin pointed out, they should form an important part of party leadership, presumably at all levels. Such leaders will, hopefully, help rectify the petty-bourgeois tendencies which so badly hinder our efforts to build a party that leads the working class.

Although intermediate workers will obviously help in the process of fusion, too, the crucial functions just described *can be truly fulfilled only by people who have the leadership qualities and breadth of vision of those advanced workers which Lenin noted every working-class movement brings forward*. It is for this reason that we oppose changing the meaning of *advanced worker*.

Most comrades who utilize the concept of advanced workers at all are aware of the key role that they (or, rather, the *real* advanced workers) will play. Accordingly, such comrades recommend that a great deal of special attention be paid to those they consider the advanced. We will speak more of this shortly, but for now we should make clear that we agree that in communists' practice, special work must be done with those who are firmest in their class stand and most progressive in their outlook. However, calling such people advanced workers, regardless of their real level, usually leads to errors, because comrades forget that, having redefined the term, they must discard the ideas which Lenin taught regarding "his" advanced.

An extreme form of the right error corresponding to confusion on these terms would be to build an entire party at the level of the redefined "advanced," even to rely on them as leadership. This objectively means substituting a mass organization of today's most active and progressive

²⁰Committee for a Proletarian Party, p. 2, and W.V.O., p. 1. We quote these statements because they typify an extremely common belief, not because the organizations quoted were necessarily influential in promoting it.

²¹*A Retrograde Trend*. . . , LCW 4: 260.

workers for a party firmly guided by Marxism-Leninism, and there are anti-Leninist socialists in this country who have advocated doing so.

The "left" error is to treat these workers as if they *are* the "real heroes," the "working-class intelligentsia," whom Lenin called advanced. It means overestimating both their commitment to the practical struggle and the level of their interest in study, leading to unrealistic demands on them in both areas. This has happened with ourselves and with other comrades locally, when the term *advanced* was applied loosely. For some workers it was mistakenly assumed that discussions of the correct position on an issue facing the union would lead to their engaging in verbal agitation for that position, when in fact they needed strong encouragement and real training to see themselves as agitators and organizers. There was also an overestimation of some workers' dedication, as would be manifested in tolerance of long meetings or in a consistent commitment to the struggle even in difficult conditions. Regarding theory, sometimes we overlooked the limitations of general works on Marxism-Leninism (e.g., Stalin's *Foundations of Leninism*) for workers who were neither stimulated nor very comprehending without propaganda employing a more concrete and factual analysis.

Furthermore, reserving the terms for such workers as Lenin described is important for keeping before us the image of the kind of workers who must and will come forward in this country. Failure to do this will encourage those with rightist tendencies to fail to work to develop advanced workers, or to ignore their intellectual needs as they do come forward. And those with anarcho-syndicalist (eg., R.C.P.) or Trotskyist tendencies to forever see workers as the militant mass and intellectuals as the leaders, the ones with the ideas, will also have a theory that encourages their deviation.

Moreover, redefining these terms obscures some of the differences between the state of the working-class movement in revolutionary Russia, where many advanced workers did exist, and in the United States, paving the way for dogmatic application of the Russian party-building experience.

We see little means for people who misuse these terms to consistently escape all of the potential erroneous tendencies, since such comrades certainly do not struggle to put Lenin's lessons about the role of "his" advanced workers out of their minds as they develop plans for working with "their" advanced workers. On the contrary, they consciously link the terms to Lenin's descriptions of the process of fusion.

Formulations are not all-powerful, of course. We probably would not repeat the errors we have made before, no matter how we labeled the workers whom we work with. But poorly-formulated theory is a poor guide to action, and there is no reason for communists to encourage mistakes by the use of confusing terminology.

Comrades who want to drop Lenin's definitions generally say that Lenin was simply describing workers in Russia in the 1890's. Certainly *parts* of *A Retrograde Trend* . . . are such descriptions. (E.g., on p. 260 he says that the advanced workers of the 1890's were Social-Democrats, i.e., not just any socialists, but Marxists.) But the description quoted above clearly covers a category of workers which was already historically defined: "Every viable working-class movement has brought to the fore such working-class leaders. .

.. And our Russian working-class movement promises not to lag behind the European movement in this respect.”

But *we are* lagging behind in this respect, and the fact that we are is a measure of the effects both the Communist Party’s revisionist betrayal and our own backwardness, as well as of the difficulty of revolutionary work in our conditions. It is this backwardness and these difficulties which many comrades want to avoid when they redefine *advanced* so that we can have our “advanced workers” here, too. (The Workers Congress, incidentally, has provided a very revealing explanation of their reasons for redefining the term. They explain that they first used the expression as Lenin did, but “[t]his undialectical approach led to demoralization within the ranks of our movement, especially when comrades found that workers from the class did not ‘live up to’ their expectations.”²² The problem was not in using Lenin’s terms, but in assuming that *today* there are many workers to whom the terms apply. Should we redefine *revolutionary situation* so that comrades need not be demoralized by finding that we are not in one now?)²³

As we said previously, it is certainly necessary to develop an analysis of the different levels of understanding, ability, and commitment among U.S. workers and agree on some labels that allow us to conveniently describe a worker’s level. But as we do this for the most progressive workers who exist in any significant numbers in this country, why choose the label that is guaranteed to confuse us about how to work with those workers and what we can expect of them?

Moreover, communists will always be faced with a perplexing multiplicity of definitions of *advanced*, etc., if we try to use the words as relative terms. For every few years, as the influence of communism within the workers’ movement grows, the level of the most developed stratum will be higher and we will have to again redefine *advanced* to fit the new conditions. But of course new definitions would not be adopted unanimously, any more than current ones have been.

The last reason why it is misleading to call today’s most progressive workers “advanced” is that many communists then assume that these are the same workers who will, in time, become the advanced workers of whom Lenin wrote. This mistake seems common among those who think that the chief form of our work in this period should be propaganda to the (redefined) advanced. The assumption can lead to overconcentration on today’s “advanced,” i.e., concentration beyond that which is justified, to the neglect of others who can become the real advanced workers.

The dialectical law of uneven development applies to human beings.

²²*The Communist*, 11/17/77, p. 8.

²³Some comrades, unable to reconcile the reality in this country with a well-known phrase from Lenin, opt for the phrase. Does not Lenin, they ask, say that “the advanced workers, *as always and everywhere*, determined the character of the movement, and they were followed by the working masses. . . .”? (*A Retrograde Trend*. . . , p. 260; emphasis added.) Lenin probably meant a role advanced workers always play when there is the kind of “working-class movement” he was writing about, one already shaking the existing social order.

Different workers find themselves in different conditions at different times and places. Even if they were, somehow, all in the same conditions at any given time, they would react differently because it is a worker's internal contradictions that are the basis for his or her development. Some of today's most developed and dedicated workers will become advanced workers. Many others lack the leadership qualities and breadth of understanding and will always be intermediate workers—hard-working socialists, but not those unusual leaders who play the role of the advanced. Still others will become discouraged and slide back, as defeats, our errors, pressures and privileges from the bourgeoisie, and their own internal weaknesses take their inevitable toll.

By the same token, many workers who do not even think about socialism today have the kind of character that will cause them to undergo "leaps" in their development and eventually become advanced workers, when they become involved in sharp class struggles and are reached by socialist agitation and propaganda. Dialectics teaches that what is strongest and most developed today will not necessarily retain that position tomorrow. This is true of people, too.²⁴ As we shall see, ignoring this fact and overemphasizing work with today's "advanced" on the assumption that they will be tomorrow's "Retrograde Trend advanced" will inhibit the absolutely essential work of creating the conditions for real advanced workers to develop.

Similarly, we think that the term *backward* should continue to be applied to non-socialist workers. This is common in Marxist-Leninist literature on doing broad mass work, and, again, it would be confusing to start switching terms just because so many U.S. workers are presently backward. Furthermore, the term is a good, objective description. Proletarians who do not yet understand that capitalism is the system that oppresses them and that socialism means liberation *are* deeply enslaved by the backward ideas promoted by the bourgeoisie. This is not a "put-down," of course. Backward workers do not possess their present illusions through any fault of their own, and a great many of them are capable of developing into intermediate or advanced workers. But their present backwardness is a fact, and one which we must face. Those who tell themselves that the most progressive non-socialist workers they know are advanced or intermediate would do better to adopt a term that reminds them of the backwardness that must be overcome before such workers will have an elementary grasp of what social system oppresses them and what kind of system can serve their interests.

This also settles the question of who should be called intermediate. If we continue to apply the concept of advanced to those special, relatively rare leaders whom Lenin spoke of, and continue to consider non-socialist workers backward, then those left in the middle, the intermediates, must be the same as Lenin's middle category. "These workers, too, strive ardently for socialism, participate in workers' study circles, read socialist newspapers and books, participate in agitation, and differ from the preceding stratum [the advanced] only in that they cannot become fully independent leaders of the

²⁴This phenomenon, obvious from everyday experience, is also mentioned by Mao in "Some Questions Concerning Methods of Leadership," MSR 289.

Social-Democratic working-class movement.”

“*The Vanguard*” or “*The Advanced*”?

One reason why many comrades resist using Lenin’s definitions is a mistaken belief that only advanced workers can join a communist party. This misapprehension is often tied to using *advanced* and *vanguard* synonymously (as in “win over the advanced” or “win over the vanguard”). Certainly the traditional use of *vanguard* refers to all workers who are or should be organized into the communist party, e.g.:

The immediate objective of the class-conscious vanguard of the international working-class movement, *i.e.*, the Communist parties, groups, and trends, is to be able to *lead* the broad masses (who are still, for the most part, apathetic, inert, dormant and convention ridden). . . .²⁵

Stalin spoke of the vanguard in the same way. (See p. 156, fn. 7, below.)

The party workers surely include thousands more people than those special proletarians, “real heroes,” whom Lenin called the advanced. Lenin wanted advanced workers to be *leaders* of the RSDLP: “This ‘working-class intelligentsia’ already exists in Russia and we must make every effort to ensure. . . that leaders of the Russian Social-Democratic Labour Party come from its ranks.”²⁶ But the rank and file is far broader. This can be seen from the membership requirements of the party (agreement with the program,²⁷ payment of dues, work under the direction of a party organization),²⁸ Lenin’s writings on its methods of organization,²⁹ published memoirs of Bolsheviks,³⁰ any good works on the Chinese revolution, and a little thought about what a revolutionary party must do and who can help carry out one or another part of its work. All these make clear that the proletarian vanguard drawn into the party must include many from the intermediate workers, who “strive ardently for socialism, participate in workers’ study circles, read socialist newspapers and books, participate in agitation.” It would be senseless not to bring as many of such workers as possible into the party, while continuing to develop them

²⁵“Left-Wing” Communism. . . , LCW 31: 93 (first emphasis added).

²⁶*A Retrograde Trend*. . . , LCW 4: 281.

²⁷Of this requirement, Stalin wrote,

Note that Lenin’s formula does not speak about *mastering* the program, but of *accepting* the program. . . .If the Party took the standpoint that Party members can be only those comrades who have already mastered the program and have become theoretically trained Marxists, it would not have formed thousands of Party circles in the Party, hundreds of Party schools where the Party members are taught Marxism and are helped to master our program.

Mastering Bolshevism (Proletarian Publishers), pp. 47-48.

²⁸*One Step Forward, Two Steps Back*, LCW 7: 242. See also *History of the P.L.A.*, p. 90.

²⁹E.g., *Letter to a Comrade on Our Organizational Tasks*, LCW 6: 233-50.

³⁰E.g., Bobrovskaya, *Twenty Years in Underground Russia* and Piatnitsky, *Memoirs of a Bolshevik*.

theoretically.³¹

Some Relative Terms

While it is important to recognize that the advanced workers, who play such a key role in fusing the two separate movements together, must meet certain *absolute* requirements to play that role, there is also a set of *relative* categories that apply to our mass work anywhere, in any period:

The masses in any given place are generally composed of three parts, the relatively active, the intermediate, and the relatively backward. The leaders must therefore be skilled in uniting the small number of active elements around the leadership and must rely on them to raise the level of the intermediate elements and to win over the backward elements.³²

Our own modest practical experience confirms this. The "relative activists" generally know their fellow workers better, and have more credibility with them, than communists who are newer to the situation, especially those with non-working-class backgrounds. Thus close work with these activists is essential for communicating our ideas to the broad masses. Furthermore, the most progressive contacts are invaluable sources of information about what all the workers are thinking, including what their criticisms of us are, and there is plenty which they can teach us about class struggle. We are firmly convinced, therefore, that in any mass work, special attention must be paid to the "relative activists," even if they are only the most progressive among many backward workers.

Moreover, such workers will be open to a higher-level analysis than their more backward brothers and sisters, and our close work with them should definitely include exposing them to whatever agitation and propaganda is appropriate for their particular level. (We return to this subject below.)

But note that, unlike the categories of advanced, intermediate, and backward as applied to workers who play particular roles in the process of fusion, the categories pointed out by Mao are entirely relative. They vary widely from place to place. We have worked in a plant where the most which the relative activists would do—with some fear and trembling—was serve on

³¹Lenin referred to "the years 1900-03, when the foundations for a *mass party of the revolutionary proletariat* were being laid in Russia." (*Left-Wing" Communism*. . . , LCW 31: 33; emphasis added.)

In Albania, five months after the Communist Party (now the Party of Labor of Albania) was formed, its Conference of Activists decided,

As to admitting new members to the Party, mainly from the ranks of the workers and poor peasants, instructions were given to the effect that the shortcomings of their theoretical and political knowledge should not bar them from becoming members of the Party. These insufficiently schooled but resolute people would be further developed and educated as fiery militants for the cause of the people and communism within the ranks of the Party.

History of the P.L.A., pp. 112-13.

It would, of course, be a gross distortion of these works to marshal them in support of a broad, loose-knit "mass party."

³²"Some Questions Concerning Methods of Leadership," MSR 288-89.

an officially-sanctioned strike preparation committee that did criticize the union leadership for hindering its work. (And in doing so they were definitely ahead of their co-workers.) In contrast, at another place, a number of workers have actively helped build an opposition newsletter and, we think, will help build a caucus aimed at toppling the union bureaucrats. In addition, in all likelihood there are places where the "relative activists" among the workers are socialists.

Lenin's identification of the advanced workers, who play such an important role in fusing the communist and workers' movements, and Mao's explanation of the method of leadership that takes into account the relative positions of different people among the masses in *any* struggle, are both important tools. But confusing the two concepts creates as many problems as either can help us solve. Mao never said to treat the best "relative activists" who come forward in any situation as if they can all play a central role in helping create a communist workers' movement, or as if they are all ready to study Marxist-Leninist propaganda.

Agitation and Propaganda

Comrades with the most diverse views on other questions believe, mistakenly, that in this period propaganda must be "in the forefront" or be "the chief form" of our work with the workers, in order to accelerate fusion. Generally this position is connected to a redefinition of *advanced worker*, and the main method of fusion is described as "propaganda to the advanced." Before considering this question, we must once again digress to defining terms, namely *agitation* and *propaganda*. These refer to two broad types of communist work in communicating our ideas to workers. Lenin's explanations of these forms of work are very helpful, so we quote them at length.

"A propagandist presents many ideas to one or a few persons; an agitator presents only one or a few ideas, but he presents them to a mass of people." . . . [T]he propagandist, dealing with, say the question of unemployment, must explain the capitalist nature of crises, the cause of their inevitability in modern society, the necessity for the transformation of this society into a socialist society, etc. In a word, he must present "many ideas", so many, indeed that they will be understood as an integral whole only by a (comparatively) few persons. The agitator, however, speaking on the same subject, will take as an illustration a fact that is most glaring and widely known to his audience, say, the death of an unemployed workers' family from starvation, the growing impoverishment, etc., and utilising this fact, known to all, will direct his efforts to presenting a *single idea* to the "masses," e.g., the senselessness of the contradiction between the increase of wealth and the increase of poverty; he will strive to *rouse* discontent and indignation among the masses against this crying injustice, leaving a more complete explanation of this contradiction to the propagandist. Consequently, the propagandist operates chiefly by means of the *printed* word; the agitator by means of the spoken word. The propagandist requires qualities different from those of the agitator.³³

The socialist activities of Russian Social-Democrats consist in spreading *by propaganda* the teachings of scientific socialism, in spreading among the workers a proper understanding of the present social and economic system, its basis and its

³³*What is to be Done?*, LCW 5: 409-410.

development, an understanding of the various *classes* in Russian society, of their interrelations, of the struggle between these classes, of the role of the working class in this struggle, of its attitudes towards the declining and developing classes, towards the past and the future of capitalism, an understanding of the historical task of international Social-Democracy and of the Russian working class. Inseparably connected with propaganda is *agitation* among the workers, which naturally comes to the forefront in the present political conditions of Russia and at the present level of development of the masses of workers. Agitation among the workers means that the Social-Democrats take part in all the spontaneous manifestations of the working-class struggle, in all the conflicts between the workers and the capitalists over the working day, wages, working conditions, etc., etc. Our task is to merge our activities with the practical, everyday questions of working-class life, to help the workers understand these questions, to draw the workers' attention to the most important abuses, to help them formulate their demands to the employers more precisely and practically, to develop among the workers consciousness of their solidarity, consciousness of the common interests and common cause of all the Russian workers as a united working class that is part of the international army of the proletariat.

. . . In conducting *agitation* among the workers on their immediate *economic* demands, the Social-Democrats inseparably link this with agitation on the immediate political needs, the distress and the demands of the working class, agitation against police tyranny, manifested in every strike, in every conflict between workers and capitalists, agitation against the restriction of the rights of the workers as Russian citizens in general and as the class suffering the worst oppression and having the least rights in particular, agitation against every prominent representative and flunkey of absolutism who comes into direct contact with the workers and who clearly reveals to the working class its condition of political slavery. Just as there is no issue affecting the life of the workers in the economic field that must be left unused for the purpose of economic agitation, so there is no issue in the political field that does not serve as a subject for political agitation. Both economic and political agitation are equally necessary to develop the class-consciousness of the proletariat. . . .³⁴

Knowledge develops from a lower to a higher level, and people must be brought step by step to a clear understanding of all that communists have to teach them. Therefore agitation frequently begins at quite a low level and may center around ideas that would not be recognized as uniquely communist, but which nonetheless would not be promoted unless communists took them up.

. . . [T]he spread of their agitation brought the Social-Democrats into contact with the lower, less developed strata of the proletariat; to attract these strata it was necessary for the agitator to be able to adapt himself to the lowest level of understanding, he was taught to put the "demands and interests of the given moment" in the foreground and to push back the broad ideals of socialism and the political struggle. . . . [Several factors] naturally led to a gross exaggeration of this (*absolutely essential*) aspect of Social-Democratic activity, which could bring some individuals to lose sight of the other aspects. . . .³⁵

³⁴*The Tasks of the Russian Social-Democrats*, LCW 2: 329, 332.

³⁵*A Retrograde Trend*. . . , LCW 4: 279-80. Too many in our movement think that *What is to be Done?* and *A Retrograde Trend*. . . say that only right opportunists gear much of their agitation to the level of those many workers who will have to be introduced to socialist ideas gradually, step by step, if we want them to listen to us at all. But what Lenin opposed was the doctrine that *none* of the workers should be taught more than

One might think that agitation would be a particularly important method of work when the political level of the workers is relatively low and the conditions in which they hunger for higher-level communist literature, classes, etc., have yet to be created. (Cf. the quotation from *The Tasks of the Russian Social-Democrats*, about agitation coming to the forefront in mass work "at the present level of development of the masses of workers" (p. 51, above). Another translation is clearer on this point:

Agitation and propaganda are inseparably linked. Agitation, however, takes the foremost place today [1897] due to the present political conditions in Russia and due to the low political level of the working masses.³⁶

However, large sections of the communist movement have believed, or do believe, that we must concentrate on propaganda, or on "propaganda to the advanced." The PRRWO-RWL remnant of the "Revolutionary Wing" took this to the extreme of entirely opposing agitational work and issuing (its idea of) high-level propaganda to all the workers (for the advanced to read). Since then, most comrades who think propaganda should be in the forefront have also stated, following Lenin, that propaganda should be inseparably connected to agitation.

A real understanding of that connection mitigates much of the confusion generated by the belief that propaganda should be the chief form of our mass work. Propaganda informs the agitators, helps develop new agitators, and provides "a fuller explanation" to the audience created by agitation; while agitation does indeed develop an audience for propaganda, helps recruit new communists to spread more agitation and propaganda, and provides those close ties to the workers' daily struggles, without which the propaganda would betray an uneven grasp of reality and amount to purposeless "self-cultivation" for those studying it. But even comrades who grasp these connections between agitation and propaganda can be misled by the "propaganda-is-the-chief-form" confusion, and for others the slogan is a barrier to a grasp of the connections in the first place.

We do not know who brought that slogan into the U.S. movement. Our first knowledge of it came from the organizations that originally declared themselves the "Revolutionary Wing" of the movement.³⁷ While they made some true statements about the functions that propaganda must serve, their conclusion that it must be the chief form of our activity was not well explained

what the backward, non-socialist workers could accept, and that agitation among the latter should be only trade-unionist. "Gross exaggeration" of work where we must put the demands of the moment in the foreground and the broad ideals of socialism in the background leads to Economism. but that does not change the fact that the work itself is "absolutely essential." See also *Principles of Party Organization*, a Comintern document written under Lenin's guidance (reprinted by Mass Publications, Calcutta), p. 16.

³⁶A. Markoff, "Lenin on Agitation and Propaganda, and the Tasks of the Communist Party," reprinted in *League of Struggle (M-L), Journal #2*, p. 15.

³⁷More recently, the best defenses that we could find of the position that propaganda is the chief form of our work appear in *The Communist (Workers Congress (M-L))*, 6/6/77, pp. 1-2, and P.U.L., pp. 14-17, 29-30.

in terms of concrete conditions here. Instead they, and others since them, relied heavily on their interpretations of the history of the Russian communist party, without explaining why that history would be universally applicable. Moreover, as we explain in an appendix, they *totally* misread that history and proclaim as a virtue what the Russian communists quickly recognized as a weakness. We think that the real history is instructive to anyone, but we especially urge comrades who do accept the "propaganda-as-chief form" line to read Appendix A before proceeding further.

*The Importance of Broad Mass Work, Including Agitation,
for Developing and Winning Over the Vanguard*

Here we speak of work among the broad masses, but we do not mean just *any* section of the people. We have not investigated the various strata of the U.S. working class, but we know that conditions for heightened class struggle and openness to socialism vary among its different sectors. We do think that communists' trade union work in this period should generally be concentrated in sectors where class struggle is fairly intense and openness to socialism is relatively higher. (See pp. 32-33, above.) Therefore, when we speak of "work with the broad masses," we mean only as opposed to confining the work to the few advanced or most progressive workers in a particular trade union setting.

With the foregoing in mind, we believe that even in this period communists must devote substantial time and attention to work among the broad masses. We devote considerable space to explaining this position here because of the strength of the "propaganda-is-chief-form" line. We discuss the vital role of propaganda separately, and we ask the skeptical reader to wait until he or she has read that section of this chapter as well, before deciding whether we negate the importance of propaganda.

Too little mass agitation and involvement in the workers' struggles will cripple the work which most communists describe as "winning over the advanced." Of course ending the separation of the communist and workers' movements means, among other things, winning over a significant number of advanced workers to communism; but downplaying extensive work among the masses will both retard the development of a significant stratum of advanced workers and isolate us from the few advanced who do exist today. These statements are even more true of intermediate workers, who, as active socialists, will be the main force (in numbers) of the vanguard party which we are trying to build.

Significant numbers of workers become advanced workers only when two conditions exist: (1) sharp class struggle, which produces working-class leaders, and (2) socialist agitation, which, when based on advanced theory, brings socialist ideas to those who are or will become the leaders, as well as to other members of the class.

The first condition is what creates devoted and talented leaders. A Chinese historian writes, "[H]eroes are outstanding figures who can only emerge from the people's revolutionary struggles. . . . [H]eroes in various periods are those

who come to the fore to answer the needs of the struggles of the masses.”³⁸ Lenin: “As the spontaneous rise of their movement becomes broader and deeper, the working-class masses promote from their ranks not only an increasing number of talented agitators, but also talented organizers, propagandists, and ‘practical workers’. . . .”³⁹ Krupskaya (Lenin’s wife): “Leaders are formed in and grow out of the struggle, from which they draw their strength.”⁴⁰ Furthermore, only intense class struggle can provide the context in which people “devote themselves entirely to the education and organization of the proletariat.” Such struggle is the basis for Lenin’s repeated statements that it is a “working-class *movement*” that brings advanced workers to the fore.⁴¹

We lack an overview of the development of such a movement here. We do think, however, that both its present manifestations (rank and file reform movements; more, and more bitter, strikes; the union bureaucrats’ failure, obviously based on inability, to try to sell wage/price guidelines) and the deepening distress of the economy make it likely that the kinds of struggles that produce working-class leaders have begun to develop and will do so increasingly in the next few years.

The fact that agitation is another factor needed to produce advanced and other socialist workers is also clear from Lenin’s writings. *What is to be Done?* argued a position that has been proven many times over: The spontaneous struggle of the working class cannot alone lead the workers to socialist ideology. The narrow economic struggle does not normally give rise to such consciousness, and that struggle takes place under conditions of the bourgeoisie’s ideological hegemony in capitalist society. What the spontaneous struggle gives rise to is trade-unionist consciousness, in the absence of a systematic attempt to bring socialist agitation to the class from outside it. This is why Lenin wrote that advanced workers come from those who “*respond* to the ideas of socialism more rapidly and more easily.”⁴² Describing the work of the Russian Social-Democrats in the 1890’s, Lenin said clearly, “Widespread agitation, naturally, brought to the forefront a growing number of class-conscious advanced workers.”⁴³ Socialist agitation is an important condition for the development of advanced workers, for it is usually the spreading of socialist ideas among receptive sections of the class generally that permits a socialist vanguard, including the advanced, to come into being and to be attracted to our propaganda. In 1899, six years before “propaganda” stopped being the “chief form” of the work and the conditions were supposedly laid for serious agitational work, according to the other line on

³⁸Tien Chih-sung, “The Masses are the Makers of History,” *Peking Review* #29, 1972 (reprinted in Yen-an Books, *On Studying World History*, pp. 16-17).

³⁹*What is to be Done?*, LCW 5: 473.

⁴⁰*Reminiscences of Lenin*, p. 7.

⁴¹E.g., *A Retrograde Trend*. . . , LCW 4: 280 (emphasis added).

⁴²*Ibid.* (emphasis added).

⁴³*Ibid.*, 279.

agitation and propaganda, Lenin insisted that agitation was required to win over the vanguard:

Agitational activity among the masses must be of the broadest nature, both economic and political, on all possible issues and in regard to all manifestations of oppression whatever their form. *We must utilize this agitation to attract growing numbers of workers into the ranks of the revolutionary Social-Democratic party. . . .* Today our agitation is too hemmed in. . . . It is our duty therefore not to legitimise this narrowness but to try to liberate ourselves from it, to deepen and expand our agitational work.⁴⁴

This is one reason why it is important to oppose an idea discussed earlier, the undialectical belief that the most progressive of today's workers who are not advanced are automatically the group that will become tomorrow's advanced. Some of them will and some will not, but if we concentrate on them *too* much, we will fail to add widespread socialist agitation to the crucible of class struggle to bring forward many other potential advanced workers who are in the proletariat now.

We also think that work directed to the broad masses, in a setting where they are in struggle, is helpful in finding advanced workers, and intermediates as well, and that such work is *necessary* for attracting them to communist leadership. Workers who involve themselves deeply in the class struggle and "devote themselves entirely to the education and organization of the proletariat" will generally not be interested in just any of the socialist intellectuals who have some ideas to teach them. Armchair revolutionaries would not appeal to such workers. They will be interested in those communists who show *in deeds* that we take the same stand, that our concern for the masses is genuine, that we are in touch with their needs and desires because we are working with them, and that our line and methods of work really do promote the work of educating and organizing the class.

Conversely, those of us whose forms of work among the masses isolate us from them will appear foolish to advanced (and all) workers. Yet many comrades would still agree with the statement that "[p]ropaganda and agitation, though directed at the advanced in terms of political content, will reach intermediate and backward workers through distributions."⁴⁵ This line was put into practice in its most extreme form by the ultra-left "Revolutionary Wing," now the U.S. Leninist Core, and by the former Communist League; but others still distribute materials to the masses that are written only for a select few. At present in this country most workers are backward enough so that materials aimed at explaining scientific socialism to the advanced, passed out in a way that looks like we are aiming them at everyone, will isolate us. (We have seen this happen locally, with the predicted effect.) We do not think that advanced workers would, or should, want to work with revolutionaries who do not mind antagonizing the masses or who are just so out of touch as to not recognize that their materials are unwanted. Those of us who do good mass work, on the other hand, putting out socialist ideas in a manner calculated to penetrate the thicket of bourgeois ideology, will find that advanced and other

⁴⁴"Appropos of the *Profession de Foi*," LCW 4: 294 (emphasis added).

⁴⁵*Workers' Press*, 9/77, p. 5.

more developed workers will be open to studying our propaganda with us. This can be done on the side, without mass distribution of the written materials to be studied.

The revolutionary duty of communists is to educate and organize⁴⁶ the working class. Our attempts to do so will bear limited fruit before communist workers are part of our forces, but we will not bring such workers into our ranks without learning to speak to the other workers at the level where they actually are. *If* we act on our theory that it takes mobilization of the *masses* (not just a few intermediate and advanced) to win even partial victories, *if* we—and our best working-class contacts—can demonstrate skill in accomplishing that mobilization by helping teach the workers what they must do and why, *if* we show that we can also remove in turn each of the obstacles to the workers' understanding of their historic mission, *if* our practical experiences give us a chance to learn to do these things, then those who are most dedicated and class-conscious will surely want to work with us, learn from us, and teach us.

*“Win Over the Advanced” or “Fuse Communism
With the Workers’ Movement”?*

It may be evident that we do not consider “Win the advanced to communism” an adequate slogan for describing party-building tasks in the workers’ movement. The abbreviated characterization of those tasks should be “fusing communism with the workers’ movement” or “deepening fusion.”

In the first place, speaking of “winning over the advanced” *assumes* that a politically significant number of truly advanced workers exists today. As we have said previously, there is little evidence that this is the case.

A subjective conclusion that substantial numbers of advanced workers do exist now leads to lowering in practice, if not in words, the concept of who the advanced are. For there is no other way to tell ourselves that we are working with advanced workers where hardly any exist. Such a conclusion also voluntaristically minimizes how much patient work we will have to do in the class to help more advanced workers develop, while also minimizing the likelihood that the workers’ struggle itself will have to continue to intensify as well. Again, concluding that the (redefined) “advanced” are the key to fusion and that our task in the workers’ movement is to win them over, even if they are not the influential leaders of working-class opinion whom Lenin described,

⁴⁶We do know comrades who think that the work of educating the workers can be separated from organizing them and providing tactical leadership in the struggle, but in general we do not think that this view has much influence in our movement, so we will avoid a full polemic at this point. We only note that (1) workers who see only the day-to-day struggle and need the final aim to be pointed out to them will not listen to those whose practice shows disdain for the day-to-day struggle for concessions; (2) we must teach the workers, through their experience, that organized and united they are powerful and *can* change the world in which they live; and (3) we must train the workers, and ourselves, in the techniques of organization by undertaking that work.

Comrades who disagree should consult *What the “Friends of the People” Are...*, LCW 1: 298; *Draft and Explanation of a Programme for the Social-Democratic Party*, LCW 2: 112-17; *The Tasks of the Russian Social-Democrats*, LCW 2: 328, 341; “The Urgent Tasks of Our Movement,” LCW 4: 369; and *What is to be Done?*, LCW 5: 425.

would encourage concentrating one-sidedly on propaganda work with these workers. (Of course with any *real* advanced workers, tremendous attention should be devoted to drawing them into our ranks.)

Moreover, it is not only those broadly influential leaders, "working-class intellectuals," called the advanced, who must be won to communism, but the entire class vanguard as it develops. In the previous few pages we spoke of the role of agitation in bringing into being and winning over advanced workers in particular, in order to prove our point to those who have been accepting the slogan, "propaganda to the advanced." But each reason why work with the advanced, or potential advanced, requires agitation applies even more forcefully to intermediate workers. If we narrowed our sights to the advanced, we would cripple our ability to deepen fusion, because we would neglect the majority of the vanguard-to-be. The advanced are uniquely critical to fusion, but the intermediates are indispensable as well.

On the other hand, thinking that the "vanguard" who can be won to communism and the party are only the advanced creates one more reason for communists' lowering their views of who can function as an advanced worker. They naturally try to work with people whom they see as potential communists, so they tend to call them "advanced" if they think that only advanced workers can be in the party.

In addition, locally we have noticed that other comrades, more careful about maintaining the definition of *advanced* but still focusing on "winning them over," tend to forget the role which our most progressive contacts, most of whom are only *open* to socialism, can play in deepening fusion when it is at such a low level. Searching for imaginary advanced workers who for some reason are not visible to us through their role in the class struggle, they too often forget to seek the knowledge, advice, criticisms, and help in propagating at least parts of our line, which the best workers whom they do know can provide.

Communists have a many-sided task in fusing communism with the workers' movement, and it includes propaganda *and* agitation *and* helping the workers organize in their practical struggles. Describing that work as "winning over the advanced" begs the question of the existence of such workers and narrows, or tends to narrow, our conception of our tasks.

"First Win the Vanguard"—True, but Misleading

There is a variant of the "propaganda to the advanced" or "win over the advanced" line: "win over the vanguard" of the working class. The P.U.L., like most comrades who use the expression, ties it to the line of propaganda as the chief form of our mass work. If it could be separated from that line, speaking of "winning over the vanguard" would bring into relief a useful distinction between the character of communist work before and after the party is actually the vanguard detachment of the working class. For we must remember that communists cannot expect great success in leading the workers' movement until we have built an organization that includes the best forces from that movement, and that we must bend every effort towards the building of such an organization. Certainly no organization that remains a group of petty-bourgeois revolutionaries, because it has been unable to help develop and recruit the most progressive workers, can expect to shoulder the

far heavier burden of leading the working class as a whole.

On the other hand, the slogan "win over the vanguard," as a description of our task in the workers' movement, is part of an over-simplified stages approach to communist work. Comrades familiar with the quotations from Lenin and Stalin printed in part on p. 158, below, often assume that the difference between activities that "win over the vanguard" and later practice that "wins the masses to the side of the vanguard" lies mainly in whether we aim our mass work primarily at the vanguard or not. As we have shown above, there is such a dialectical connection between the forms of mass work aimed at the broad masses of proletarians and the development of a socialist vanguard, and between such mass work and the winning over of that vanguard to communism and the party, that any slogan that implies that we can win the vanguard by looking for its members and doing propaganda with them is bound to be misleading. In our movement that misleading implication has been ensured, through long association between the lines of "win over the vanguard" (or "win over the advanced") and "propaganda is the chief form of our work in the workers' movement."

Stalin's description (in the quotation just mentioned) of the periods in the history of the Russian party is certainly true. There was a period of building up the party, including recruiting the best representatives of the working class into it. That period preceded the revolutionary upsurge in which this vanguard was better able to win a following among the masses in general, to get them to take political action under the party's leadership. But it is important to note that *during* the earlier period no one was trying to encompass the party's practical tasks in the slogan "win over the vanguard." Rather, Lenin described himself and those who worked with him on the *Iskra* newspaper as "[t]hose who make nation-wide political agitation the cornerstone of their programme, *their tactics, and their organizational work.*" Moreover, he ridiculed an opponent who "imagines that troops in the course of systematic organization [the workers and intellectuals trying to unite into a party] are engaged in something that isolates them from the masses, when in actuality they are engaged exclusively in all-sided and all-embracing political agitation, i.e., precisely in work that *brings closer and merges into a single whole* the elemental destructive force of the masses and the conscious destructive force of the organization of revolutionaries."⁴⁷ Similarly, the Albanians, beginning with a party of 200 members who were largely isolated from the mass movement, did not set aside a special period for work with a vanguard. Rather, in 16 months of widespread propaganda, agitation, building mass organizations, and leading political and military actions, they greatly strengthened their ties to the people. What about winning over the vanguard, building the party? In the same brief period, their membership doubled and nearly doubled again.⁴⁸

The conditions that permitted such remarkable success were far different from what exists in the U.S. today. (The P.L.A. was leading the resistance to a fascist Italian invasion.) The point, however, is that it is wrong to think that the

⁴⁷*What is to be Done?*, LCW 5: 512.

⁴⁸*History of the P.L.A.*, pp. 99-141.

historical experience of the Russian party compels us to identify a period where we tailor our work to “winning over the vanguard.” The need to *develop and* win over such a vanguard certainly exists, and developing it and winning it over means broad agitating and organizing, as well as propaganda for those who respond most favorably to the broader work or who come forward on their own. What will be different about a later period, a period in which further building of the (already-formed) party will no longer be primary? Not that we will be serious about agitational and organizational work for the first time, but that such work will be more effective, consistent, and organized; will spread far beyond the industrial proletariat; will be far more successful because of the proletarian character of the party carrying it out; and will place before us the welcome duty of planning mass demonstrations (let us thank the people of Iran for reminding us what *real* demonstrations are!), strikes, and insurrections, i.e., the kinds of actions that develop as the vanguard effectively leads the masses.

Other Key Reasons for Agitation

We have explained why agitation among the broad masses is essential for deepening fusion, including its part (shared with propaganda) in bringing into being and winning over advanced workers and a working-class vanguard as a whole. Before moving on to the role of propaganda, it is necessary to consider another whole set of reasons for broad agitation, reasons which are less directly connected to our work of fusing communism with the workers' movement.

The first reason is a matter of class stand. Practice—providing ideological and practical leadership to the struggles of the proletariat against capital—is the reason for our existence as communists in any period. It should be limited “only” by our weaknesses at the present primitive stage of our movement's development and by the demands of our other tasks—doing theoretical work, struggling to unite communists on the line flowing from that work, developing necessary organization, etc. These demands are, of course, extremely heavy in this period, and they do place real limits on our mass work, a fact that the existing parties practically ignore. So does our lack of experience in carrying out such work. While in a later period writing a good agitational leaflet or making a tactical decision for the mass work may be fairly routine for some people, now the process—if taken seriously—often requires painstaking struggle each step of the way.

There are, therefore, important factors limiting our *ability* to work with the mass movement. But on the question of devotion to the needs of workers facing the economic and political attacks of capital, the correct stand means that communists should pull back only as much as we have to from trying to give the people the guidance which they need. We do not have a lot of trust in those revolutionaries who are short on love for the people.

Second, practice raises the questions which theoretical work must answer. We do not mean this narrowly, e.g., that communists should only study those questions which the day-to-day work of a few individuals raises. The practice of the movement as a whole should provide direction to our theoretical work. For example, when some comrades study the operation of the many-sided state

apparatus and the changes that it is undergoing, they should base their priorities on the need to refute whatever particular forms of bourgeois reformist ideology on the state are common among the workers (e.g., government as a restraint on capital, the reliability of OSHA, the strength of civil rights enforcement).

The same applies to study of the economic system and its decline. That study should be built around the particular questions and illusions that the workers have about what is the present and future of the U.S. capitalist economy. Communists' progressive worker contacts will be able to help us understand the main forms of bourgeois ideology which we must address if our theoretical work is to be directed towards increasing our ability to educate and organize the proletariat. But for them and for us, knowledge of the backward viewpoint comes mainly from real participation in the class struggles of the masses. The particular bourgeois lines which we must focus on will be expressed most openly as we put forward a correct line, in a manner truly aimed at winning the workers over. *Then* we will learn what the obstacles to acceptance of that line are, and we can orient our theoretical work accordingly.

We do not, of course, see this as the *only* criterion for establishing theoretical priorities. Marxism-Leninism also allows us to predict questions likely to *become* burning practical issues to the working class, such as events unfolding in the international arena, and begin now the work of developing the needed basic grasp of the issues involved. Other kinds of questions for study and investigation were discussed in Chapter II. The fact remains, however, that we must be well grounded in practice if we want to aim our theoretical work at the target, as Mao would say.

Third, mass work, including widespread agitation, is an important part of the investigation on which our theoretical work must be based. As Mao had to emphasize repeatedly, "If you want knowledge, you must take part in the practice of changing reality. If you want to know the taste of a pear, you must change the pear by eating it yourself."⁴⁹ Study of Marxism-Leninism and of materials about U.S. society to be found in the libraries is a big part of knowing the outlooks of different classes in our society, the perspectives of different strata among the workers, and the ways the state functions, for example. But if we stopped there, that knowledge would be bookish, incomplete, and full of enough mistakes to really disable us in communicating with the workers. At many points what we have to say will inevitably diverge in one way or another from the reality which they experience, particularly since we come from the petty bourgeoisie and cannot shed the petty bourgeois outlook through desire alone.

What must be added to the book-learning, to truly know the reality of a stratum's typical outlook, or the forms in which state employees carry out its tasks both of cooptation and reform and of repression? Participation in the struggle to change that reality. Learning the views of different classes and strata by participating in the class struggle with them, or against them, as the case may be. Experiencing the complex role of the state by being part of the struggles in which the state intervenes. "Marx undertook detailed investigations and studies in the course of practical struggles, formed

⁴⁹"On Practice," MSR 71.

generalizations and then verified his conclusions by testing them in practical struggles—this is what we call theoretical work.”⁵⁰

Furthermore, as Mao explained in his teachings on the mass line, much of our knowledge will come from the people themselves, if we go among them and participate in their struggles. (We will, of course, be able to raise that knowledge to a much higher level if we synthesize the people’s scattered and separate ideas, gathering them from many sources and applying the science of Marxism-Leninism and knowledge of history and politics.) The minimum demands of a party program, those points that communists fight for and use to guide their agitation and propaganda on a day-to-day basis, must especially come from a thorough familiarity with the masses’ own perceptions of their needs and of the ways in which they experience oppression. The close organic contact with the working people that is required to apply the mass line in any consistent way is rarely, if ever, possible without participation in their struggles.⁵¹

Fourth, practice in the class struggle is the test of the correctness of the different lines on how to move that struggle forward. For this to be a real test, participation in struggle cannot be “on the fringes” by working with the most progressive workers in a way not directed to leading the whole group involved, or by passing out propaganda that will mean something only to such workers. As we struggle to learn the correct line for party work that will lead the masses, we must make *some* attempts to lead the masses now, though our ability to do such work is far less now than it will be after a party is formed.

Fifth, most communists today are intellectuals (educated people trained for “mental work”), and we frequently come from petty bourgeois backgrounds. This class background gives rise to a whole complex of very serious opportunist tendencies, and practice among the masses is an essential element of the struggle to remold ourselves, overcome those tendencies, and develop a working-class outlook. We take this up at some depth at this point, because the problem is seriously underrated in our movement (except when denunciations of an opposing group are tied to its class character).

Lenin minced no words about the tendencies of intellectuals: “With large numbers of radical intellectuals in the ranks of our Marxists and our Social-Democrats, the opportunism which their mentality produces has been, and is, bound to exist, in the most varied spheres and in the most varied forms.”⁵² “A tight hold must always be kept on the intelligentsia. It is always the instigator of all sorts of squabbles. . . .”⁵³ He quoted Kautsky on the

⁵⁰“Rectify the Party’s Style of Work,” MSR 215-16. Mao develops this further than we should here in “On Practice,” MSR 70-71, where he stresses the need for “personal participation in the practical struggle to change reality,” and pp. 74-76. See also *What the ‘Friends of the People’ Are. . .*, LCW 1: 297-98 and fn.

⁵¹We are speaking, of course, of the need for *organizations* to engage in broad forms of practice. Not every individual member assigned mainly to theoretical work or some other specialized function must be concurrently involved in practice.

⁵²*One Step Forward, Two Steps Back*, LCW 7: 401.

⁵³Speech at the Third Party Congress, LCW 8: 415.

individualism of the intellectual:

As an isolated individual, the proletarian is nothing. His whole strength, his whole progress, all his hopes and expectations are derived from *organization*, from systematic action in conjunction with his fellows. He feels big and strong when he forms part of a big and strong organism. This organism is the main thing for him; the individual in comparison means very little. The proletarian fights with the utmost devotion as part of the anonymous mass, without prospect of personal advantage or personal glory, doing his duty in any post he is assigned to with a voluntary discipline which pervades all his feelings and thoughts.

Quite different is the case of the intellectual. He does not fight by means of power, but by argument. His weapons are his personal knowledge, his personal ability, his personal convictions. He can attain to any position at all only through his personal qualities. Hence the freest play for his individuality seems to him the prime condition for successful activity. It is only with difficulty that he submits to being a part subordinate to a whole, and then only from necessity, not from inclination. He recognizes the need of discipline only for the mass, not for the elect minds. And of course he counts himself among the latter.⁵⁴

The same circumstances, plus the fact that students are given their training in order that they may serve the exploiting classes, incline intellectuals to the view that "these classes and that intelligentsia which serves them, have the right and the duty to manage, make laws, plans and projects, to command, whereas the working masses have only to execute, to produce, to fight. . . ." ⁵⁵ Furthermore,

. . . [A]bstraction, the separation of mental work from manual work, means that the intellectual is not in contact with things, but with their symbols. This brings idealist illusions. His being between classes makes him think that he is not impelled by any class interest and that everything is determined by his judgments and knowledge alone. He thinks that he stands above classes and represents a morality independent of the economic forces and class antagonisms. This thought, divorced from manual work, from life, makes him think of himself as the supreme force of order in the world. This takes the intellectual out of the sphere of reality and makes him think that all contradictions should be solved not through violence, but through intellectual conciliation, through peaceful evolution. These views predispose him to opportunism.

. . . [I]ntellectualist concepts and practices have their basis also in the size of incomes and in the way of life of the intelligentsia.⁵⁶

Not that these opportunist tendencies are manifest in their extreme form, in conscious elitism and idealism, in all or even most revolutionary intellectuals. But the *tendencies* are certainly there, and they are certainly destructive. Engels even said that the German law outlawing socialist activity had the great merit of getting the intellectuals to drop out of the movement!⁵⁷

If we have gone a little overboard in the use of quotations about the opportunism of intellectuals—most of which, by the way, would apply to the petty bourgeoisie in general—it is not because of a passion for flagellating

⁵⁴*One Step Forward*. . . , p. 323.

⁵⁵*Albania Today*, 1975, #5, p. 17.

⁵⁶*Ibid.*

⁵⁷Letter to C. Schmidt, Aug. 5, 1890, MESW 690.

ourselves or the rest of this movement. It is because fusion is all too often seen solely as a process of winning over workers, neglecting the equally necessary work of *transforming ourselves*. And that neglect is only furthered by a one-sided emphasis on the propaganda work with which some are far more comfortable than closer involvement with the people and their struggles.

Mao explained that intellectuals' knowledge of the world, and even of Marxism itself, is one-sided and distorted until they have integrated themselves with the masses and actually participated in the class struggle and begun remolding their outlook.

Many intellectuals in Yenan were very confused in their thinking and came forth with all sorts of queer arguments. . . . Until an intellectual's book knowledge is integrated with practice, it is incomplete or indeed very incomplete. It is chiefly through reading books that intellectuals acquire the experience of our predecessors. Of course, reading books cannot be dispensed with, but by itself it does not solve problems. One must study the actual situation, study practical experience and factual material, and make friends with the workers and peasants. . . . If the intellectuals do not discard the old and replace it by the proletarian world outlook, they will remain different from the workers and peasants in their viewpoint, stand and feelings and will be like square pegs in round holes, and the workers and peasants will not open their hearts to them. If the intellectuals integrate themselves with the workers and peasants and make friends with them, the Marxism they have learned from books can become truly their own. In order to have a real grasp of Marxism, one must learn it not only from books, but chiefly through class struggle, through practical work and close contact with the masses of workers and peasants.⁵⁸

(This is related to the third point above. There we discussed the need for practice as part of theoretical investigations, to provide an all-sided view of the facts. Here we are emphasizing the aspect of keeping the intellectuals firmly enough rooted in the reality of the class struggle to develop and maintain a proletarian outlook.)

Practice in the class struggle is important for steeling the characters and firming up the class stands of those of us who are from non-proletarian backgrounds. We do not want to be the kind whom Mao described like this:

Some have read a few Marxist books and think themselves quite learned, but what they have read has not sunk in, has not taken root in their minds, so that they don't know how to use it and their class feelings remain unchanged. Others are conceited; having picked up some book-phrases, they think themselves terrific and are very cocky; but whenever a storm blows up they take a stand very different from that of the workers and the great majority of the working peasants. They waver while the latter stand firm. They equivocate while the latter are forthright.⁵⁹

These aspects of remolding the outlook of intellectuals and other petty-bourgeois revolutionaries comprise the fifth reason, besides deepening fusion, why serious attention to practice among the masses is important today.

Sixth, teaching Marxism to workers requires applying the theory to

⁵⁸"Speech at the Chinese Communist Party's National Conference on Propaganda Work," MSW V: 426-27. Mao also explains the incompleteness of book knowledge without practice in "Rectify the Party's Style of Work," MSR 214-16.

⁵⁹"Speech at Propaganda Conference," MSW V: 425.

day-to-day practice. Mao's words about what it takes for intellectuals to grasp the theory apply to workers, too: "In order to have a real grasp of Marxism, one must learn it not only from books, but chiefly through class struggle, through practical work and close contact with the masses of workers and peasants."⁶⁰

Seventh, we must try to lead the broad masses in struggle in order to train ourselves to be leaders. Not all communists in a party, particularly among those of non-proletarian origin, will be leading either mass struggles or units of the party, of course. But many certainly will, and for developing the ability to do so there are no shortcuts; what is required is experience. Study and discussion can teach a great deal, but they do not teach us to be rousing orators or good popular educators; cool judges of situations and of people's characters; expert listeners; quick, decisive, creative, and sound tacticians; or consistent models of steadfastness under attack.

Finally, serious involvement in the day-to-day struggles of the masses—which surely includes agitation aimed at those who are struggling and assistance in their organizing—is going to be essential in building Marxist-Leninist unity, particularly unity between the party-building forces and those in other parties and tendencies. Opportunism and the struggle against it are inescapable in a living communist movement. What are not inescapable, however, are the following features of this struggle, which are characteristic in the U.S.: failing to distinguish between *degrees* of opportunism; always carrying out polemics as debaters who want to destroy their opponents, never recognizing that we are often in a teaching-and-learning struggle for unity with people who should be *allies*; failing to examine other lines all-sidedly, to look for what is true even in those that may be incorrect overall; lack of patience or desire to win over communists thought to be committing serious errors; failing to encourage members to read the polemics of other organizations; declaring an organization that has unified only a small part of the movement as *the* party, which assumes most communists to be so opportunist as to be outside the communist movement; etc.

These are all manifestations of serious "left" sectarian confusion about who are our friends and who are our enemies, and it is easy for ex-students to develop such confusion. Many of us learned to promote ourselves through academic papers and classroom debates. Moreover, the desire to be 100% correct and have those who disagree seen as 100% wrong is typical of the individualism of the petty bourgeois. But in real struggle against a real enemy, people must choose between being badly beaten, or uniting with all

⁶⁰Ibid., 427. And further:

If you can apply the Marxist-Leninist viewpoint in elucidating one or two practical problems, you should be commended and credited with some achievement. The more problems you elucidate and the more comprehensively and profoundly you do so, the greater will be your achievement. Our Party School should also lay down the rule to grade students good or poor according to how they look at China's problems after they have studied Marxism-Leninism, according to whether or not they see the problems clearly and whether or not they see them at all.

"Rectify the Party's Style of Work," MSR 213.

who will fight on the same side, despite serious differences stemming both from varying degrees of opportunism, and also from different experiences. Such struggle will teach many people that sectarianism is a luxury which we cannot afford when we declare war on the imperialist bourgeoisie of the United States of America.

Furthermore, we will *have* to learn some lessons sooner or later from the oft-repeated experience of hearing frustrated workers ask us why we cannot iron out our differences, as they drop out of struggles dominated by the battles of communists seeking to "expose" each other.

None of this means that unity can be built only among local forces engaged in joint practice, a view that we criticize in a later chapter. Just the same, though communists can surely unite into nationwide tendencies, the barriers *between* those tendencies will probably only be breached through the unifying effect of practice. And we mean broad mass work, not just competing to get the same few workers into study circles or "fightback" organizations.

The first portion (pp. 22-98) of the *History of the Party of Labor of Albania* details a graphic example of this process. The small, sectarian circles of Albanian Marxists moved forward in a long struggle to unite in a party only when the need to resist invading Italian fascists threw the rank and file of these groups into real class struggle, side by side. There they overcame their major differences, put their minor ones in perspective, cast aside most of their leaders (who still had a stake in maintaining the small-circle spirit), and finally formed the party. One way to lessen the risk that a similar disaster (like the next world war) will have to befall U.S. workers before the communists place ourselves in circumstances encouraging unity is to engage in the practical struggle in a serious way now. And, of course, to the extent that our practice brings worker-communists into our movement, the conditions feeding petty-bourgeois sectarianism will be weakened by the addition of the proletarian element.

These, then, are the reasons why communists need to carry out broad mass work now, along with much propaganda, as we also take up the theoretical work needed to make our agitation and propaganda more correct and persuasive.

The Vital Role of Propaganda

Agitation without propaganda would lead to a dead end. Even if it were somehow effective, its greatest achievement would be the creation of indignation towards the abuses of capitalism and, perhaps, towards the capitalist system itself, along with a general consciousness of the need for common struggle. But the struggle would have no direction.

We know of no influential line in the communist movement that openly argues for putting propaganda on the back burner. Lacking a need to criticize anti-propaganda doctrines, comparable to those denigrating agitation, we can present the reasons why propaganda is essential without a lengthy series of polemics. Briefer treatment of the need for propaganda does not, however, make it any less important.

Chapter II of this book, on the pressing theoretical tasks of communists in this period, is a good beginning on the functions of propaganda, for the full

results of our theoretical work can only be communicated through propaganda. Only propaganda can express serious study of basic questions of Marxism-Leninism, analyses of conditions in this society and the world, and the political line to guide the struggle of the proletariat. Furthermore, the necessary struggle over disputed issues can only be conducted through propaganda, whether in polemical articles on a fairly narrow question like the E.R.A., or in books, articles, and forums on party-building, the national question, and the international situation.

Moreover, when we call (as we do in Chapter II) for the writing of a book that analyzes the state apparatus in this country, or for one elucidating a class analysis, or for one proving the decline and inevitable collapse of U.S. capitalism, we are talking about propaganda. This kind of propaganda is needed to carry out what Engels called the theoretical form of the class struggle, the struggle against bourgeois ideology, which he placed on the same plane as the economic and the political forms of the workers' struggle.⁶¹ While agitation in the course of the economic and political struggles is a major weapon against the bourgeois world-view, it is not enough without serious, full-scale studies that dismantle the bourgeois myths.

Propaganda is also required to provide agitators the knowledge that will make agitation effective. Agitators dealing with the Bakke and Weber cases, for example, need propaganda to arm themselves with the facts and analysis needed to fill the gap between, say, *Marxism and the National Question* and what the bourgeois newspapers tell us about the cases. Otherwise they must rely on "example-based" rhetoric, which we spoke of in Chapter II, to make their points about the source and severity of national oppression and about the role of the state.

And if such agitation were somehow effective, it would, as we said above, be able to create only heightened indignation and a clearer sense of the target of that indignation, but not a scientific grasp of the class relations of this society and the operation of its institutions. Without forms for providing that grasp, communists could never win the working class to the political line that will show, strategically and tactically, the way out. Even now, as events in the world, developments in the class struggle in particular industries, and communist agitation make more and more workers want to learn how the communists explain what the workers experience and see around them, fusing communism with the workers' movement requires an ample supply of books and pamphlets, the creation of study circles, and the use of lectures, forums, and films. In our own fairly undeveloped mass work, for example, we have found a crying need for popular pamphlets that would explain to progressive, though backward, non-socialist, workers what communists are, the causes and effects of various divisions in the working class, the connection between sell-out bureaucratic unions and capitalism itself, etc.

And we, like many other comrades, have found some workers willing to study scientific socialism with us; what we lacked were our own skills in conducting such study and materials suited to the level of the interested workers. Neglect of such propaganda work, to teach the most progressive workers the correctness of the communist program and to teach them

⁶¹See *What is to be Done?*, LCW 5: 370, 372.

Marxism-Leninism itself, would amount to keeping communism the preserve of the revolutionary intellectuals and petty bourgeoisie. This would be as fatal to the building of a vanguard *workers'* party as failure to pay due attention to agitational work. Because we would be maintaining the serious handicap of having mainly petty-bourgeois communists trying to communicate with and lead the workers, overemphasis on agitation would, ironically, delay the tremendous boost our agitation will receive when workers are doing much of the agitating. We would also be maintaining the fertile soil for opportunism that is found in a communist movement which is not yet a communist workers' movement.

Our own experience shows that it is easier to polemicize against the error of too little attention to the development of communist workers than to avoid it, especially for small circles. The error can take right forms: servicing the day-to-day struggle in the hope that its gradual growth will lead to socialist consciousness among the workers; seeing fusion simply as communists' integrating ourselves in the workers' movement at its present level; or not recognizing differentiation among the workers and the need to do forms of education that rise above the lowest common denominator. Though, as we said, we know of no influential and open justifications for such an approach, it does exist. For example, the Movement for a Revolutionary Left, one of the "anti-'left'" groups, even forgets that we are to teach the workers at all. It describes our principal task in the workers' movement as follows: "to integrate ourselves in the struggles of the working class and other oppressed people, learning from them, molding ourselves in these struggles and win the respect and confidence of the masses. . . ." Later, in a more detailed breakdown, the M.R.L. remembers to add "[a]gitation and propaganda in the working class to raise the level of class consciousness and understanding of what socialist revolution means."⁶² But there is still no hint that we need books, pamphlets, study groups, and forums to take the *more developed* workers to a higher level than the broad mass work can do. A tendency to see the consciousness of all workers at the level of the average also emerges in statements of the Bay Area Communist Union,⁶³ and in practice they are not at all consistent in trying to develop those who are most active and progressive.

Too little attention to the development of communist workers can also take "left" forms: the R.C.P.'s anarcho-syndicalist tendency to believe that very militant, even adventurist, struggle will give the workers all the consciousness they need about "the rich man"; or tendencies of others to be content with acting as the vanguard themselves, rather than recognizing the crucial importance of assisting a *workers'* vanguard to develop.

In any case, the result is the same, and it is at odds with the whole idea of fusing communism with the workers' movement. For these reasons, we would oppose snatching the real quotation from Lenin about agitation "coming to the forefront" when the workers' consciousness is low,⁶⁴ as a shorthand slogan

⁶²M.R.L., *A Critique of Ultra-Leftism, Dogmatism and Sectarianism*, pp. 86, 88.

⁶³In particular, their presentation at a forum they conducted on trade union work April 9, 1978. The presentation is available in pamphlet form.

⁶⁴See p. 51, above.

guiding communists' work, as much as we oppose such use of the distorted quotations about "propaganda as the chief form."

Is Propaganda the "Chief Form" of Our Work?

Supporters of the line that propaganda is the chief form of our mass work in this period do occasionally go beyond dogmatic application of their inaccurate history of Russia and provide concrete arguments for our supposed inability to do significant agitational and organizing work. (However, we have seen no one who takes this position *independently* of a misreading of the historical quotations.) Although in general the line has little vitality among anti-"left" communists, the P.U.L. does support it. Since, once more, they seem to have made the most serious attempt to support their position with some actual reasoning, it is their arguments that we will take up. They make four main points, most of which have also been put forward by others:

(1) Propaganda is the main method for training the vanguard (p. 17). Or, as the Marxist-Leninist Collective has put it, "How else to train the vanguard, if not through a thorough study of the communist movement, and detailed analysis of concrete conditions?"⁶⁵

(2) While trying not to liquidate all agitation in this period, they basically believe that the social forces who are today's communists are incapable of agitation to the workers. Only (redefined) advanced workers who become communists will be able to do this (p. 53).

The revolutionary ideologues from the mass movements of the 'sixties by and large cannot match the advanced workers for either their knowledge of working-class life or their ability to agitate among and lead the masses. Fusing the working class movement with Marxism-Leninism therefore demands focusing on propaganda work among the proletarian vanguard, so that the communist forces can successfully pass over to widespread agitation.

(3) Only "an extensive organization," consolidating intellectual and working-class communists, can conduct widespread and consistent agitation (p. 15). The *Guardian* takes this a step farther, stating that no steps towards fusion can be taken until the party is formed, so that all communists can be united on what to do and say when we go to the workers (3/16/77, p. 21).

(4) We need propaganda to struggle for the correct line on the questions dividing the communist movement, and to propagate the studies we must do of concrete conditions in the United States (p. 29).⁶⁶

Each of these statements has an important element of truth in it, but that element is treated one-sidedly by those who use these arguments to justify either right fear of going to the masses at all (P.U.L., apparently) and "left" predispositions to go to them with materials entirely inappropriate to their

⁶⁵*Workers' Press*, 9/77, p. 5.

⁶⁶The alleged primacy of propaganda over agitation is sometimes defended in part by blurring the distinction between doing this theoretical work and propagating it. (See, e.g., P.U.L., p. 34.) The two are closely connected, but theoretical study—whether in the libraries or through investigating mass movements close at hand—is not propaganda. Cf. *What is to be Done?*, LCW 5: 410.

level ("for the advanced") ("the Wing," some collectives which we know).

The first point was answered previously. Yes, propaganda is definitely needed for teaching advanced workers (and, we would add, intermediates) so that they can play their role in educating their class. But we will have neither the ability nor the context in which to train them as agitators and organizers if we do not also engage in such work ourselves and with them.

On the second, third, and fourth points, clearly our agitation will be far more extensive and better when our forces include more workers, when we have a party to make the work consistent and organize the development of the best materials, and when our movement is united more, along a correct line. But when all these things are interconnected and depend on each other for their mutual development, it is wrong to just single one out, say that its low level is an obstacle to the development of the others, and conclude that it is the "chief form" of our work. In fact, the same one-sided method can be used to justify the line that broad mass work is primary in this period since, after all, it will move forward both our theory and Marxist-Leninist unity.

The low level of fusion, disorganization, divisions, lack of theory, and prevalence of incorrect lines all greatly hinder effective mass work, but they do not render it impossible by any means. Justifying our own inactivity by citing such obstacles would only help perpetuate them. For one thing, progressive worker contacts can greatly assist us in developing literature that speaks effectively to the concerns of fellow workers—we do not need to wait until there is a communist workers' vanguard before communists can address the workers with some effect.⁶⁷ As for our disorganization, it is not qualitatively worse than that of the local circles of Russian Social-Democrats who did so much to promote fusion by their agitational activities in the 1890's. A professional, united, nationwide organization can vastly *improve* our ability to do agitation, as Lenin consistently argued; but making this a *precondition* for agitational work is just an excuse to justify failure to go to the masses until conditions become more favorable, or failure to develop materials geared for their actual level.

Finally, yes we do need propaganda to struggle for the correct line on the questions dividing the communist movement and to propagate new theoretical knowledge, but nothing in this simple truth requires propaganda to overshadow our other forms of work by becoming our "chief" activity.

We have said a great deal about propaganda and broader forms of mass work, and a summary might be helpful at this point:

1. Since our movement frequently refers to Lenin's observations about the role of advanced workers in fusing the communist and workers' movements, we should use his definition of whom he is talking about. With regard to such workers, socialist agitation and organizing are required to:

- (a) Permit advanced workers to develop in the first place (in the context of sharp class struggle);
- (b) Serve as one means for bringing us into contact with advanced

⁶⁷While rejecting the P.U.L.'s fundamental belief that it is so difficult for non-proletarian comrades to do broad mass work that it is "left" adventurism to try, we do think that many forces greatly underestimate the difficulties of such work, do not rely on the people, and end up making "left" errors.

workers;

(c) Attract advanced workers to our leadership because of our stand towards, and effective work in, the struggles to which they dedicate themselves;

(d) Train the advanced with whom we work to become better leaders; and

(e) Teach them the Marxist theory by applying it to the solution of concrete problems of the class struggle.

These points are equally true of intermediate workers, who will also be an important part of the class vanguard.

2. Practice in the struggles of the broad masses, including agitation directed to them, is also important because:

(a) It is always our task to educate and organize the proletariat in its struggle against the attacks of capital, and such work should be limited only by the demands of other work needed to move the struggle forward;

(b) Practice raises the questions which theoretical work must answer, and our limited theoretical resources should be directed to those problems which most need to be studied in order to enable communists to teach and lead the workers;

(c) We cannot study the society all-sidedly without participating in the struggle to change it;

(d) Drawing on the extensive but unsystematic knowledge possessed by the people themselves demands being close to them in a way that is difficult without participating in their struggles;

(e) The correctness of different lines must be tested in practice;

(f) The intellectuals who currently comprise a high percentage of the communists must participate in practice to remold their outlooks, complete their book-learning with practical experience, and strengthen their characters;

(g) We cannot train leaders from among our number without experience in leading; and

(h) Full participation in mass struggles will help overcome "left" sectarianism between communists, through some practical lessons in who are our friends and who are our enemies, and through the pressure of the workers.

3. We need a great deal of propaganda to disseminate the results of our theoretical work, struggle over line, and play a role—varying with the consciousness of the workers—in educating advanced, intermediate, and some backward workers. One-sided preoccupation with agitation could neither produce communist workers nor provide direction to the mass movement. It would even undercut our ability to agitate effectively, on the broadest scale, by limiting the quality of the agitation and by preventing the development of thousands of working-class agitators.

4. (See Appendix A.) Attempts to find historical support for the line that propaganda should be the chief form of our work among the masses err in two ways: they totally misread that history, in which the Russian Marxists in fact rejected a similar concept, after trying it briefly, and they treat the supposed history dogmatically, instead of asking what is and is not universally applicable in the alleged experience of the RSDLP.

For these reasons, we believe that it is crucial in this period for communists

to do a great deal of broad agitational and organizing work, work not just "directed at the advanced in political content," either.⁶⁸ Describing propaganda as the chief form of our activity in the working class badly underrates the importance of agitational and organizational work among the broad masses. If actually practiced, such a one-sided approach would, among other things, distort the knowledge we seek to acquire in our theoretical work and make it virtually impossible to help develop and win over advanced and intermediate workers. Making agitation the chief form would badly underrate the role of propaganda in developing and winning over a proletarian vanguard. It would lay the basis for economist errors in practice and for building a party that continues to represent a separate, petty bourgeois communist movement.

Our party-building task regarding the workers' movement is to overcome that separation by taking communism to the workers' movement, which we can do only with a balance of propaganda, agitation, and providing tactical and organizational leadership, a balance that must be tailored to the circumstances of each struggle.

Are we stopping here, without saying whether agitation or propaganda is "primary," but simply insisting that they are interconnected, as described on p. 52, and that a great deal of each is crucial?

Yes we are. Perhaps when there is a better assessment of communist forces and what we can accomplish spending "X" man-hours of work on different tasks, we can say whether agitation, the various forms of propaganda, or any of our other tasks demands the most time, if that would serve some purpose, but even that identification would not show primacy in the sense of being the principal aspect of a contradiction or a key link. What is clearly important now is to learn to "play the piano with ten fingers," as Mao put it, and recognize that all our work will suffer if we neglect any important aspect of it.

As for any supposed "contradiction" between agitation and propaganda, it is a bookish view of dialectics to hold that in every pair of related tasks one must become the "chief form of activity." Is eating the bread or consuming the soup "the chief form" of taking a meal? Is use of the knife or fork "primary" in eating a steak? In mining coal, is cutting the mineral from the seam or loading it into the buggies "the primary aspect of the contradiction"? Loading the buggies or hauling them out?

Different parts of the job of mining coal, or of the job of raising the consciousness of the working class, can be dialectically interconnected without being in contradiction. A contradiction is a phenomenon which develops according to the internal struggle between its opposite components:

The identity of opposites (it would be more correct, perhaps, to say their "unity". . .) is the recognition (discovery) of the contradictory, *mutually exclusive*, opposite tendencies in *all* phenomena and processes of nature. The condition for the knowledge of all processes of the world in their "*self-movement*," in their spontaneous development, in their real life, is the knowledge of them as a unity of opposites. Development is the "struggle" of opposites. . . a unity of opposites (the division of a unity into mutually exclusive opposites and their reciprocal relation).⁶⁹

⁶⁸ *Workers' Press*, 9/77, p. 5.

⁶⁹ "On the Question of Dialectics," LCW 38: 359-60.

The development of working-class consciousness is indeed a phenomenon that proceeds according to the struggle and interaction between mutually exclusive opposites that comprise it. But those opposites are bourgeois ideology and proletarian ideology. Agitation and propaganda are no more in contradiction, opposites in struggle, than the two horses pulling a carriage. Of course, at any given time and place one may be pulling the load more. Similarly, at one factory a period of agitation may be required before there is any audience for propaganda, while at other times consolidation of a core of worker activists will be required before effective broader work could go anywhere. But the practice of U.S. communists is simply not a phenomenon determined by the struggle between agitation and propaganda, with one of those poles of the contradiction being primary and determinative of the character of that practice for the entire period of party-building.⁷⁰

When one aspect of our work starts to overtake another, when one begins to suffer from neglect, then communists must change our division of labor, our allocation of resources, to correct the situation. Particular circumstances could lead to a phase of communist work where there would be a temporary, nationwide shift to unusually heavy emphasis on propaganda (if, say, it were necessary and possible at some point to use a series of pamphlets and forums to break the influence of the CPUSA over a large group of active workers) or on agitation (e.g., an emergency mass anti-war mobilization, though it is still hard to conceive of the work going very far without propaganda). But we do not see how the present situation either requires or permits an answer to the question of whether propaganda or agitation is "in the forefront" as "the chief form of activity" of communists in the workers' movement. What is crucial to keep in mind is that communists will have reached only a fraction of our potential for leading a broad mass movement before we are organized into a party, one utilizing advanced theory and one that includes a sizable vanguard section of

⁷⁰Our treatment here of contradiction is oversimplified. We are not well trained in philosophy, but we can say that Marxists have used at least two concepts of contradiction in addition to that expressed in Lenin's article. One is the apparent logical absurdity of propositions which seek to describe living phenomena in static, absolute, metaphysical concepts. Such propositions produce "contradictions" that are "resolved" by use of dynamic, relative, dialectical concepts. See F. Engels, *Anti-Duhring* (International Publishers: N.Y., 1939) p. 132; also pp. 70-71, 131-35.

Second, sometimes the term *contradiction* is used to label a problem, i.e., a situation where considering the best course of action from only one side produces a situation diametrically opposed to that produced by considering it only from another side, but where an all-sided treatment of the question produces the correct resolution. E.g., p. 110, below, where we consider the benefits of forming a party-building organization with the highest possible level of unity to start with, and those considerations which point to openness and inclusiveness in such an organization.

In the text above we compare the question of the primacy of agitation or propaganda to that use of *contradiction* which refers to the internal contradictoriness in phenomena as the explanation for their motion and development, for two reasons. First, we think that Lenin was correct in describing such contradiction as "the essence," "the kernel" of dialectics ("On the Question of Dialectics," LCW 38: 359, and "Conspectus of Hegel's *Science of Logic*," LCW 38: 223, 229). (See also Mao's *On Contradiction*.) Second, only with this conception of contradiction can it be said that one aspect of the contradiction must be primary.

the working class itself. Our agitation and propaganda must not only be kept in a good balance relative to each other, but they must both be subordinated to the overall task of creating such a party.

Some comrades may wonder about the significance of this struggle over a clear formulation of our tasks. After all, hardly anyone since “the Revolutionary Wing” has tried to *literally* make “propaganda the chief form” of their work. And most comrades who accept that slogan are by now careful to add such statements as “At the same time, we must establish an inseparable connection between agitation and propaganda.” The concrete view that many such comrades have of what exemplary practice would look like is probably not all that different from our own view. Moreover, clarity on a statement of the correct line is no guarantee of correct work, as mistakes in our own practice have taught us. Thus we enter the debate over these slogans to help end it, not because we think that it should occupy the attention of communists for the next five years.

On the other hand, misleading slogans describing our tasks are bound to do *some* damage, the damage varying with how seriously comrades take their own words. Those who have tried real agitational and organizational work should know that the demands of genuine involvement in the practical struggle are so great as to render meaningless the idea that something else could simultaneously be the “chief” (“principal, foremost, greatest”—*Oxford English Dictionary*) form of our work. Any comrades who did honestly apply the formula that propaganda is the main thing we are doing among workers could not possibly take up broader practical tasks in a serious way. Even those who are less consistent and “deviate” towards broader mass work cannot help but be influenced by the incorrect line which they continue to recite. For example, comrades we have worked with have sometimes had trouble tailoring their agitation to their mass audience. They justified their attempts to present too many ideas with too little proof by stating that they were still “mainly aiming at the advanced,” since, after all, propaganda to the advanced is the chief form of our work. . . . Not a logically perfect, necessary consequence of the line, but not surprising, either.

By this point, the significance of the debate over how to use the terms *advanced*, *intermediate*, and *backward* should also be clearer. Besides encouraging less experienced comrades to overrate backward, non-socialist workers whom they call “advanced,” redefining the term produces a vanguard created not by the class struggle and communist activity, but by a verbal maneuver. Then it becomes easy to believe that our mass work should have as its central focus winning over that vanguard, rather than *the development and winning over of such a vanguard*, which requires a broader and more all-sided approach to the practical struggle. Misleading slogans and formulations may not be an insuperable handicap to that approach, but they certainly do not help.

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN DEEPENING FUSION AND PARTY-BUILDING IN GENERAL

Our own view of this relationship should be fairly clear by now. For the reasons stated on pp. 60-65, above, even if it were somehow necessary or desirable to seek to first unite the existing communist movement, or a section of it, into a party through ideological struggle alone, relative isolation from practice would defeat the attempt to unite communists, on a correct line. Moreover, the postponement of serious attempts to assist the development of a communist workers' movement is not considered desirable by any communists, though some consider such postponement necessary. We believe it unnecessary, although the building of a consistently Marxist-Leninist party will certainly permit a qualitative leap in communists' ability to carry out such work.

To complete this chapter on practical tasks of party-building, we discuss more briefly our disagreements with three other positions on practice: the *Guardian's* failure to see the importance of focusing on practice that will most directly permit fusing communism with the workers' movement; their position that real steps towards such fusion must await the uniting of communists into a party; and the Philadelphia Workers' Organizing Committee's view that, on the contrary, party-building essentially *is* fusion.

Focusing Practice on the Working Class

The *Guardian* fails to distinguish between different kinds of mass work and the social strata that each attracts. If we are trying to build a *proletarian* party, what is needed is a firm focus on deepening fusion, working with *workers*. This means going first and foremost to workplace and trade union struggles in the most promising and strategic centers. In a period where fusion is so low and the communist forces are so weak, dissipation of those forces by involvement in other struggles should be strictly limited to those that also involve many workers as participants (e.g., a police-repression struggle in a working-class community) or which are particularly valuable for some aspect of the social investigation of this country which we must also carry out in this period. What kind of guidance do we get from the *Guardian*?

...[T]here are a number of areas in which immediate questions take on an urgency to which all Marxist-Leninists should respond [by taking up the struggle]. Among these are solidarity with national liberation struggles (particularly southern Africa today), affirmative action, racism, women's rights, strike support, environmental issues, antiwar issues and others.⁷⁰

There are many "questions" which "take on an urgency" as long as capitalism rules, and our agitation and propaganda to the workers should speak of as many of these as possible. But to set no priorities on to whom we

⁷⁰9/7/77, p. 12. Once, almost lost in a number of statements emphasizing liberation support work or stating no priorities at all, Irwin Silber did write, "Concededly, just making the workers' movement its prime arena of political concentration at this moment would be a step forward for communists." 3/16/77, p. 21. It is a shame that the *Guardian* declines to make this "concession" when it enumerates the tasks of *Guardian* clubs, the organizations which it urges communists to join.

should speak, as if it is a matter of indifference whether Marxist-Leninists concentrate on the workers' movement on the one hand, or spontaneously allow their forces to get diverted to non-proletarian E.R.A. coalitions, anti-nuclear-power groups, or liberation support coalitions, on the other, is to forget that the main way to respond to these "questions" is to develop the links with the class which can eventually do something about them. We must avoid both the right deviation, based on complacently letting the workers' movement develop on its own until Marxist-Leninists unite (the *Guardian*), and "left" delusions that liberation support committees that mobilize a few hundred "movement" people and students for a demonstration in a large metropolitan area are affecting world politics.

Neither the problem, nor the solution, is new:

The creation of a durable revolutionary organization among the factory, urban workers is therefore the first and most urgent task confronting Social-Democracy, one from which it would be highly unwise to let ourselves be diverted at the present time. But, while recognizing the necessity of concentrating our forces on the factory workers and opposing the dissipation of our forces, we do not in the least wish to suggest that the Russian Social-Democrats should ignore other strata of the Russian proletariat and working class. . . .The Russian Social-Democrats think it inopportune to *send* their forces among the handicraftsmen and rural labourers, but they do not in the least intend to ignore them; they will try to enlighten the advanced workers also on questions affecting the lives of the handicraftsmen and rural labourers, so that when these workers come into contact with the more backward strata of the proletariat, they will imbue them with the ideas of the class struggle, socialism and the political tasks of Russian democracy in general and of the Russian proletariat in particular.⁷¹

Certainly the same reasoning applies even more forcefully to the question of involvement in struggles that presently can attract few proletarians of any kind, but involve more the petty bourgeoisie, students, etc. Not that this will always be the case. When there is a well-developed workers' movement led by a vanguard workers' party, then we will have forces to send into other strata of the population, to do mass work there and to gather crucial knowledge. Moreover, we will be able to mobilize the proletariat in support of struggles such as those listed by the *Guardian*; and, on the international situation in particular, we will replace internationalist gestures with the internationalist actions of millions of workers. But we are not at that point today, and we will never get there if we do not now focus our practice on fusing communism with the workers' movement.

This leads to our next point. Parallel to the MLOC's happy discovery that fusion is at a high level because communists cannot exist separate from the workers' movement lies the opposite error. That error is the view that no real steps can be taken towards fusion until Marxist-Leninists unite in a party. This, in fact, is what the *Guardian* believes, which explains their hit-or-miss approach to priorities for practice in this period.

⁷¹*The Tasks of the Russian Social-Democrats*, LCW 2: 330-31. Later, as the communist forces grew, the same focus on the working class alone would have been a serious error. See *What is to be Done?*, LCW 5: 429.

Can We Promote Fusion Now?

The *Guardian* has little to say in supporting its opinion that fusion can only be begun by an organized party. As the PWOC has pointed out, Irwin Silber (apparently speaking for the *Guardian* as a whole) presents a false pair of alternatives (“‘which comes first—‘fusing’ communism with the workers’ movement or building a new communist party?”). He then finds that “‘a moment’s thought’” is sufficient to prove his own choice correct—forming a party through uniting ideologically on the basis of scientific socialism.⁷² The first of the two arguments that “‘a moment’s thought’” produced was that communists cannot establish a base in the working class without being organized as communists and united ideologically. This flat assertion is not rooted in reality. Granted, practical work is very uneven, confused, and restricted in scope when we are organized only in small local forms, compared to when we are in a party, but it is not impossible to carry it out at all. In fact, “‘a moment’s thought’” is enough to recall that the fragmented, amateurish, and often politically misguided circles of Russian Social-Democrats made great strides towards fusion in the Russia of the 1890’s.

Silber’s second argument is that in “‘developing the connection between the communists and the proletariat,’” we must know “‘to do what?’” and that the communists must have a conscious plan for developing this connection. Some important link of the argument is unstated. Silber must either think that only a party can develop a line on trade union work, or that all communists must unite into a party and agree on a line before any can try out the lines they think are correct. But he implicitly (and correctly) rejects both positions a few lines later, for he proceeds to elaborate eight fairly developed principles for trade union work, principles which “‘are offered as contributions to a discussion on communist strategy within the working-class movement that must be the first order of business for a new communist party—and that may help give some direction to existing Marxist-Leninist groups who are correctly attempting to combine their party-building efforts with their involvement in the working-class and democratic struggles of the present.’”

Yet here, in another Silber article May 4, 1977, and in articles on the work of the *Guardian* clubs, the *Guardian* still clings to the elimination of deepening fusion from the list of our tasks in this period. These half-hearted and inconsistent arguments seem to stem from the contradiction between the *Guardian*’s occasional recognition that we can and must do trade union work in this period, on the one hand,⁷³ and its ambition to lead the movement to build a party (and build the *Guardian*’s sources of news and funds) on the other. For if deepening fusion is one of our party-building tasks, it is evident, as the Potomac Socialist Organization has pointed out, that the *Guardian* lacks the experience, the contacts, and a good form of organization for carrying out communist work in the working-class movement.

A different argument for delaying attempts to deepen fusion with the workers’ movement was elaborated by the Tucson Marxist-Leninist Collective,

⁷²See *Guardian*, 9/7/77, p. 12.

⁷³And Silber recently seemed to put his own position on a par with others, stating that “‘the time has come for a more refined formulation.’” *Guardian*, 1/31/79, p. 21.

although the comrades have since told us that they do engage in mass work and consider it important.⁷⁴ Claiming to be summarizing (uncited) works of Lenin, the TMLC stated that fusion requires (1) a communist party or "organization developing toward a party," which has unified the communist movement, (2) a workers' movement producing the advanced workers described by Lenin, and (3) Marxist-Leninist theory, understood correctly at the general level and fully applied to analysis of concrete conditions in the U.S. and elaboration of proletarian strategy and tactics. We have read nothing in Lenin supporting the first supposed requirement. As we pointed out in considering the *Guardian's* line, what the Russian experience actually shows is that a significant level of fusion can take place even when the communist movement is fragmented into small circles, at least under some conditions and with the right kind of work.

The TMLC expanded on the *Guardian's* argument by asserting that unless the communists are united into an organization guided by the correct theory, we will inevitably drift into economist fusion, subordinating communism to militant trade-unionist ideology. Like so many of those who hold that we cannot even undertake one or another task until some other work is practically carried out to perfection, the TMLC seemed to think that communists should not try something until there is a guarantee that all of us will do it right. Maybe only a third of us will carry out good communist practice, while another two thirds make serious "left" or right errors that render our work ineffective. If so, a third will accomplish some valuable work, and *all* of us can learn from the positive and negative examples of the various kinds of practice undertaken. However, if none of us does anything, the mistakes are avoided, but nothing is being accomplished or learned.

Lenin's writings do not support the second TMLC requirement for fusion, that the workers' movement must first produce many advanced workers (as if it could do so in the absence of communist agitation), and we explained its lack of foundation in discussing the P.U.L.'s view that the vanguard must be won over before we can really do broader mass work.

Nor can we agree that either Lenin's teachings or anything else shows that no meaningful progress in fusing the communist and workers' movements can be made (besides an economist integration of communists into trade-unionist struggles) without near-completion of our theoretical tasks. The TMLC expressed views similar to our own on the crucial need for theoretical work and the severe limitations on our ability to raise the consciousness of workers

⁷⁴See *Party Building Tasks in the Present Period: On Theory and Fusion*, pp. 17-22.

In a recent letter the TMLC told us that in fact they do attach importance to practice aimed at raising the consciousness of workers, and they cited their article on the primacy of theory in *Theoretical Review*, #7. If this is now their position, it is a significant departure from that taken in their pamphlet on party-building. Such a departure is not stated in the later article, either. Perhaps the written position that conditions do not exist "for genuine fusion to begin to occur" is an exaggeration which the comrades slipped into in their polemic against the line that party-building *is* fusion.

Regardless of the comrades' current views, the arguments published in their pamphlet are a line in the movement, and we think that we should address those arguments here.

without materials that apply a Marxist analysis to the facts of U.S. society. To us this points up the urgency of communists devoting a sizable portion of our resources to theoretical work and recognizing that remedying our theoretical weaknesses is the key link for moving all our party-building work forward. But the TMLC, in their party-building pamphlet at least, seemed to take this to the point of negating our ability to do *any* useful work in raising the level of, and winning over, workers in this period. We cannot disprove that view yet, for we have seen communists make only beginning, tentative steps in deepening fusion, but we think we can see how past failures come from serious errors, "left" and right, and not only from the dearth of theory. (Rectifying such errors itself requires a good theoretical understanding of Marxism-Leninism, but it equally requires experience.) Our own trade-union work convinces us of a serious requirement for propaganda materials to assist that work, but we are also developing our influence with a few workers who want to learn more about communism, in part because of our ability to grasp what is going on in the trade union struggles and to provide tactical leadership. Albanian history also provides an example where the communist party, though lacking a deep study of the society and propaganda based on such studies, was able to win broad influence among the masses based on its minimal program of national liberation and democracy. And nothing that we find in Lenin—who strongly emphasized the need to engage in practical work while studying the society⁷⁵—supports the TMLC's attempt to paraphrase him. While communists should certainly not throw themselves into the mass movement as if the lack of theory and communist unity will be only minor hindrances to our ability to help a communist vanguard develop, we must also oppose relegating practical work to a minor role. Aside from the questionable wisdom of trying to form a petty-bourgeois communist party as a first step and transform it into a workers' party later, the attempt itself would be futile. It would be defeated by the theoretical mistakes and opportunist deviations which cloistered intellectuals cannot avoid, and by our inability to unify without practice, both to help prove certain lines correct and to bring in workers who will struggle against petty-bourgeois sectarianism.

But is Practice Party-Building?

We have dealt so far with those positions which see little importance in significant mass work in this period, either because they view "propaganda to the advanced" as the primary means of deepening fusion or because they think that we can do little about fusion until after formation of a party or an organization functioning much like one. Among those whom we think are mistaken about the relationship of practice to party-building, comrades who downgrade practice are clearly in the minority. There remain those forces who believe that deepening fusion, mainly through agitational and organizational work, *is* party-building. This error takes both "left" and right forms.

The "left" form, which forces like the P.U.L. and others in the anti-"left" section of the movement have identified, is for communists of intellectual and petty-bourgeois origin to go out into the mass movement as if fusion were

⁷⁵What the "Friends of the People" Are. . . , LCW 1: 297-98 and fn.

already at a high level and we were recognized working-class leaders, instead of people who have a great deal to learn before our teaching can have much influence. Groups like the Revolutionary Union, often the October League, and, on a smaller scale, the A.T.M., organized themselves like parties and started to act like parties long before developing the nerve to call themselves *the* party. They have not to this day recognized the degree to which effective practice will be limited until real efforts are devoted to our theoretical tasks; they often tend to overrate our ability to win workers over to our ideas by stating a correct principle and giving an example or two; and they never frankly recognized the extent to which we must learn from the workers and the extent to which we must remold ourselves in practice. The difficult obstacles which communists coming from the intermediate strata face in doing good mass work have generally gone unrecognized, and therefore comrades plunge in without regard for their own limitations. (This also leads to periodic retreats into right errors, as comrades try to overcome their isolation.) For the old R.U. justification for this deviation came in the argument that we needed to build the mass movement before seeking to unite Marxist-Leninists in a party, without recognizing the severe limitations on our ability to influence the mass movement at all. Naturally, those organizations that now admit that they see themselves as the vanguard party of the working class also tend to define their tasks solely in terms of leading the masses.

As an aside, we must emphasize that despite these and other serious and consistent "left" deviations in party-building line, some of these organizations have been very inconsistent in *political* line and tactics. The October League, now the CP(M-L), went through an uncomplicated rightist period of totally uncritical promotion of unreliable trade union reformists like Arnold Miller, conducting reformist, lawsuit-centered struggles for affirmative action; and tailing reformist Black leaders, before flipping to their anti-Sadlowski stance and taking a cue from the R.C.P. on putting more into "pure" new workers' organizations than into the struggles within the unions. The A.T.M./L.R.S., despite tremendous "left" sectarianism in their anti-Bakke work and in their policy towards communists with whom they have serious differences, pursues trade union work in our area, at least, that leaves their members practically indistinguishable from the few workers who think that new faces in union office will reform the unions.

And the picture becomes much more complex when line on the international situation is taken into account. The thoroughly elaborated, extreme right rationale for the Theory of Three Worlds' concept of the united front,⁷⁶ and the consistent revisionism of the Chinese leaders whom the CP(M-L), L.R.S., and others follow blindly, produce very strong ideological counter-currents to the "left" tendencies that remain in these organizations, making it foolish to assume that their "leftism," even if it was once or even is now primary, must remain so.

Lenin and Stalin often wrote that petty-bourgeois revolutionaries are extremely unstable in their principles and vacillate from adventurism to reformism. There is no reason, in theory, why forces pursuing "left"

⁷⁶See pp. 9-10, above.

party-building lines could not commit right deviations in their political line and practice, and in fact several do just that.

Among parties that do not call themselves The Party, the clearest expression of the "left" voluntarist line of building the party by acting like one today came from the A.T.M., before it merged with the I.W.K. and included secret negotiations in the CP(M-L)-initiated "unity committee" as part of its party-building work. As we mentioned in Chapter I, the A.T.M. explicitly opposed communists' evaluating our tasks in the context of party-building and saw no difference in our tasks before and after conditions for forming a party have been created.⁷⁷ In October, 1976, they mentioned the need to develop a plan for party-building, and in March of 1977 they said that they were trying to figure out the key link in party-building.⁷⁸ They did say that it will be whatever best permits us to develop "nationwide political agitation which exposes the capitalist dictatorship in all its aspects, which points the class in the direction of its own dictatorship, and which shows the class, on the basis of the experience of daily life, the necessity for its alliance with the revolutionary national movements, and other fighters for democratic rights."⁷⁹ It is hard to imagine the A.T.M. and its successor organization puzzling over this for two years; all other Marxist-Leninists know that *the way to develop such agitation is to form a vanguard party*. The big question is how to do that.

The A.T.M. thought that the answer is some form of evolution from the process of organizations trying to act as much as they can like the party. This lead them to (1) organize themselves in the form of a party, like others, and (2) consider mass political agitation as our *main* task in this period and as the *means* "[t]o build an organization capable of giving political leadership; to meet the upsurge of the working masses, to satisfy their demands for knowledge and organization and directions [sic]. . . ."⁸⁰ At the same time, they gave no attention to theoretical work (except to "prove" that there is a Chicano nation) and made no public contribution to discussion of how to struggle for unity within the communist movement, and how to organize that movement to the extent possible under present conditions. They have been content with their own immersion in agitation, urging others to do the same, as if we were already part of an organized, unified party that has done its theoretical homework and can concentrate totally on educating and organizing the class.

They justified this with curious logic. Quoting Lenin, they stated the obvious truth that the kind of organization we will form will depend on the tasks which we set for ourselves. To us this means that we will form a Leninist party capable of doing nationwide agitation only if we see such agitation as one of its tasks. But the A.T.M. leaped to the conclusion that *the way to develop* such an organization is to take up those same tasks, in the same way, now.⁸¹ This

⁷⁷*Revolutionary Cause*, 10/76, p. 5, and 11/76, p. 11.

⁷⁸*Revolutionary Cause*, 10/76, p. 5; Colorado Organization for Revolutionary Struggle, *Denver Forum, Five Organizations Speak on. . . Party-Building*, p. 27.

⁷⁹*Denver Forum. . .*, p. 27.

⁸⁰*Revolutionary Cause*, 5/77, p. 3.

⁸¹*Ibid.*, p. 6; *Red Banner* #2, pp. 12-13.

kind of reasoning would have us trying to teach toddlers to give agitational speeches and shoot guns, because we want them to grow up to be good revolutionaries. Thus it is not surprising that the A.T.M. opposed distinguishing between our tasks in the present period and after we have a vanguard party, that their successor group still focuses its work almost entirely on agitation, and that they have nothing to say (or do) about our theoretical tasks. Their rare articles on the tasks of communists in this period deal only with broad mass work. Acting as if we are already a vanguard party is a "left" error, notwithstanding the widespread belief (which we shared until recently) that *all* varieties of overemphasis on practice are hallmarks of right opportunism only. The comrades are impetuously trying to skip to the stage when conditions will permit communists, organized and united in a party, and possessing a solid base of theoretical study, to turn the bulk of our resources to educating and leading the masses. In this way they are following in the footsteps of the R.U., with its emphasis on building the mass movement (while in fact evolving into an unacknowledged party formation), as well as those organizations openly declaring themselves the party to lead the masses.

Yet there is, in addition, a right deviation which also sees party-building in terms of fusion. Taking this line literally, small local groups would devote almost all their efforts to their practice, hoping that, as workers join our forces, the conditions for forming a vanguard working-class party will somehow be generated. Though we agree that the petty-bourgeois composition of the movement is a tremendous obstacle to the fulfillment of its tasks, the answer cannot be, "Wait until our local practice produces enough communist workers." What such a conception of our tasks leaves out is the struggle to unite—on a correct line—a core of today's communists, those who must carry the work out. Equating party-building to fusion also dangerously downgrades our theoretical tasks, making them sound not only not primary, but incidental at best. Finally, such a party-building line ignores the organizational steps which we can take to open up lines of communication and struggle, in order to better serve efforts at unification, theoretical work, and practice. Narrowing our tasks to local practice can leave us plodding along in that form of work forever, and even the stated goal of fusion would meet with little success.

The Potomac Socialist Organization and the PWOC both state our tasks in a way that would at least permit this deviation, although it later became clear that they and others were simultaneously making the quiet initiatives that led to formation of the Organizing Committee for an Ideological Center. The P.S.O. has stated conditions for party-formation that involve only the level of fusion, and the PWOC insists that "party-building is *in essence* a question of fusion" and that the struggle "to fuse communism with the advanced workers. . . [is] the essential (or central) task of party-building."⁸² We are not sure what these statements mean, since both groups speak of our theoretical tasks (PWOC even calling them primary) and both show a recognition of the need for the struggle for unity with other communists, or, rather, with communists

⁸²P.S.O., *On the Party-Building Question*; PWOC, *The Organizer*, 8/78, p. 11, and 12/77, p. 10. (The P.S.O. comrades now distribute their 1976 pamphlet along with a statement that it no longer adequately expresses their views on party-building.)

who share their views on the international situation.

The P.S.O. does not attempt to explain the basis for its conclusions, but the PWOC does. It gives what are, in fact, three reasons why we must carry out serious practical work in this period, and then makes an illogical leap to the conclusion that building the party is, "in essence," bringing about fusion. The reasons are that the process of fusion "raises the questions around which we must unite," that the verification of correct theoretical work in practice will provide the basis for communist unity by proving which line should be united around, and that we will avoid unprincipled unity by only uniting around lines proven in practice.⁸³

These statements are all one-sided. Communists must also address questions that will not be raised in our immediate practice, and on many points we will have to at least tentatively unite around answers that come from the historical experience of the world proletarian movement. If not, we would have to wait, e.g., until *after* the next world war to decide who was correct on the stand the proletariat should have taken on the war.⁸⁴

But even to the extent that the PWOC's statements are true, none of them shows that practical work, theoretical investigations, ideological struggle, and organizational initiatives aimed at improving our capacity to carry out all of these cannot or should not take place concurrently, with a very significant commitment of resources to each of them. Comrades who see their own local practice as their part of party-building will inevitably give insufficient attention to these other tasks. On the other hand, there are also signs that some OCIC organizers plan to implement the party-building line that the A.T.M. articulated and that all the existing parties have followed: voluntarist unification into an (undeclared) democratic-centralist party, to permit better nationwide agitation (to deepen fusion).

We do not know enough about the PWOC and the P.S.O. to know what their practice is or why they equate party-building to fusion, but at least the potential dangers of this formulation are clear nonetheless.⁸⁵ Moreover, associated with the fusionist position are mistakes on the pre-conditions for party-formation (see Chapter IX) which could unnecessarily lengthen the period in which we stumble along without a party.

⁸³*Organizer*, 12/77, p. 10

⁸⁴The PWOC even names capacity to improve fusion as the criterion for the correctness of political line (*The Organizer*, 1/78, p. 12). This is a rightist distortion of the principle that the correctness of a line is tested in practice. It is certainly possible, for example, that a social-chauvinist line on the international situation would, for several years, have more mass appeal than an internationalist line.

⁸⁵Some comrades close to the OCIC think that the PWOC would agree substantially with what we have said about the primacy of theory, and that their role in the OCIC formation shows that they agree on the need for an organized party-building effort. According to this view, the PWOC has backed itself into the corner of saying "party-building is fusion" in the course of its debate with the *Guardian* line (party-building is basically uniting Marxist-Leninists). If this is so, the PWOC should drop the one-sided slogan for a statement of our party-building tasks that is all-sided and less likely to mislead.

PARTIAL SUMMARY

(We summarized the bulk of this chapter on pp. 67-68, above. Here we continue with the topics discussed after that point.)

We must fuse communism with the workers' movement using propaganda, agitation, and providing tactical and organizational leadership. The balance between these interrelated forms of work will vary according to the circumstances. Neither agitation nor propaganda should be made the chief form of our mass work for the pre-party period or even for a major part of it.

Since a key purpose of our practice in this period is to deepen fusion, practice must be consciously focused on the workers' movement or other struggles in which many of the participants are workers. We should not indiscriminately devote our limited resources to struggles that today involve only petty bourgeois strata or the Left itself. This means, for example, that we should generally take agitation about national liberation struggles or equality for women to the workers where we find them and can work with them, not go off into coalitions where we cannot.

In the *Guardian*-PWOC debate about whether party-building is uniting Marxist-Leninists or fusing communism with the workers' movement, both groups are one-sided and, therefore, largely incorrect. The *Guardian* and, in the past, at least, the TMLC, have mistakenly argued that promoting fusion can and should be delayed. The *Guardian* relies mainly on how handicapped we are in doing such work before we are united around a correct line; the TMLC raises similar objections regarding our theoretical weaknesses and other factors. Both ignore historical experience in which important strides in fusing communism with a workers' movement were made despite similar weaknesses among the communists. Both seem to want guarantees that all our practice will be guided by a correct line before we learn by trying our different lines in practice. Finally, they ignore the dangers of keeping a petty-bourgeois communist movement divorced from the class struggle and from working-class influence, and they ignore the pressing reasons for practical work listed in the mid-chapter summary.

But trying to promote fusion is not, in itself, party-building either. Party-building is promoting fusion, *and* studying our concrete conditions, *and* reaffirming and developing basic Marxist-Leninist principles, *and* struggling for unity on correct political and organizational lines to guide the party, *and* alertly watching for opportunities to weaken the hegemony of opportunist lines over the existing parties, *and* building the pre-party organization that can do these things. Though a more all-sided position seems to lie behind the PWOC line, its statement that party-building is essentially fusion could strengthen the deviation which leads local circles to be satisfied with doing little but their own narrow practice. The PWOC slogan could also promote the deviation of forming now another small, undeclared, democratic-centralist party in which the rank and file focus almost exclusively on practice, despite the unsettled nature of many key theoretical and political questions.

IV

Organizational Tasks: Uniting Party-Building Forces

Before further discussion of the relationship between U.S. communists' theoretical and practical tasks, we must also consider work in a third realm, the organizational.¹ For many comrades it goes without saying that we should be in organizations large enough to have members in a wide geographical area, if not throughout the country, organized in a democratic-centralist form. Others seem to be satisfied with organizing in small circles and waiting for higher forms of organization to develop spontaneously some day. Neither view corresponds to the current needs and potential of communists outside the existing parties.

There is a host of reasons why it is wrong to be satisfied with separate small circles. As others have pointed out before us, individual collectives and local organizations engage in a tremendous duplication of effort as each tries to sort out the many line questions facing the movement. Moreover, comrades in one group, who may be floundering on some question, are usually unable to benefit from the better grasp which comrades in another circle have acquired. And if communists were undertaking serious study of this society, we would certainly be duplicating each others' efforts in this area of work.

Moreover, neither social investigation nor development of line can be all-sided and correct if we are each hemmed in by the limitations of our own local experience. Puzzling problems of practical work among the masses now need to be solved by each group separately, usually based on a series of painful mistakes which a particular collective may or may not be able to evaluate objectively. We get no benefit from each others' experiences handling problems of internal organization. The massive output of communist literature in this movement never centers around good polemics on one or two main questions, permitting comrades to follow the debate and eventually unify the great majority on correct answers. As it is now, who among us is even able to

¹We decline to enter the debate over whether ideology, political line, or organization is "key" in the present period. We have seen nothing to support the assumption, made by many comrades in the past, at least, that communists' party-building tasks go through these "periods." It is clear from both the international communist experience and our concrete conditions that we have very great theoretical and practical tasks in this period. And it would be irrational not to also consider how to organize ourselves to carry out those tasks.

keep up with the literature?

Most important, we are not working in concert, according to an agreed-on plan, to help create the conditions for forming a party.

The small-circle form of organization is ineffective. Acceptance of it most often manifests a right error of passive acquiescence in our primitiveness, assuming that somehow a higher level of work will evolve on its own. But such acceptance can also be fueled by "left" sectarian disinterest in uniting with those with whom one has any important differences.

A HIGHER FORM OF ORGANIZATION

What comrades in local circles need, in order to carry out party-building effectively, is a network linking our organizations. (In the next chapter we discuss who should be in the network; here we discuss the need for this organizational form.) We think that a party-building network should, in this period, carry out the following functions:

(1) Paying due attention to security, assess its own forces—their number, geographical and industrial concentration, and strengths and weaknesses in doing theoretical, practical, and organizational work;

(2) Struggle for broad agreement on an agenda for the two (related) main kinds of theoretical work: all-round study of the features of U.S. society, and applying Marxism-Leninism to the various political line questions facing the proletariat (goals and tactics of trade union work, demands for which the party will fight regarding the international role of the U.S., national question, woman question, etc.);

(3) Divide the work of studying U.S. society, insuring representation of different views in the body that takes up each question; submit each plan for research projects to the whole network for suggestions; circulate questionnaires covering the areas of social investigation so that the comrades responsible can draw on nationwide experience; discuss and debate theoretical works as they are completed;

(4) Take up, in the agreed order, political line questions for joint study and struggle, using a theoretical journal, privately circulating papers, conferences and forums, etc.;

(5) Develop outlines or questionnaires to guide preparation of good summations of practice; circulate and comment on each others' summations;

(6) Where the level of unity is high enough, coordinate practical campaigns (e.g., building a nationwide caucus in an industrial union);

(7) Arrange for comrades to travel and meet each other to learn about conditions elsewhere, and to lessen reliance on possibly self-serving written materials as we develop assessments of each other;

(8) Assign task forces to prepare periodic objective reports on the most influential parties and organizations in the rest of the movement, with comrades "specializing" in each organization and reporting on developments in their line and practice.

Organizing the Network

Here we want to make some tentative suggestions as to how a party-building network could function internally, in addition to what we have already said

about the functions of the organization and what we said in Chapter II about how it could organize theoretical work. We state these to help concretize the idea of the organization we are talking about, but many organizational details would depend on the number and character of the forces participating.

1. There would probably be an elected steering committee, and depending on the size of the steering committee, perhaps a smaller executive committee. The steering committee would survey the strengths and weaknesses of our forces; organize security; establish communications, reports, and publications (in accordance with plans agreed on by the entire organization); identify programmatic and other questions that require study and struggle; decide priorities for the order in which such questions are to be taken up; make assignments of comrades to bodies doing theoretical work; organize the work of monitoring the communist press; prepare conferences.

2. Neither the steering committee nor other bodies established by the network would be empowered to answer, for the organization, important questions that are still controversial within it. They should, however, help identify questions and focus the struggle.

3. On questions within the steering committee's authority, every group participating in the network could struggle within the steering committee for its views. On matters fundamentally affecting the work of the network, member groups could also take their disagreements to the entire organization.

4. The organization would set approximate standards for the amount of support that each local group and individual should contribute to the network as a whole. Such support includes not only financial contributions, but commitment of a specified portion of its available manpower to the work of the network. (This would obviously vary as to the size of each group, but there should also be flexibility because of varying strengths and weaknesses of each group.)

5. Provision should be made regarding the voice, vote, and contributions to the work by individual comrades unaffiliated with any local group. We think that independents should be permitted to participate, but that they should be strongly encouraged to join or form a constituent group.

6. IT IS ESSENTIAL THAT EACH GROUP COMMIT ITSELF TO HAVING ITS ENTIRE MEMBERSHIP STUDY AND DISCUSS THE DIFFERENT POSITIONS THAT ARE PUT FORWARD WHEN THERE IS STRUGGLE OVER QUESTIONS OF IDEOLOGY OR POLITICAL LINE WITHIN THE NETWORK. Some comrades, of course, can and should be more responsible for each circle's relations with the network. But the struggle for unity and the correct line requires that each group do all that it can to avoid the circle spirit exemplified by today's larger organizations, where the members place unjustified confidence in their leaders' views, and the leaders too often devote their attention to proving that they are right and outside critics are wrong. Avoiding this problem means letting all groups which participate in the network reach every other comrade with our views, and letting each of us influence—in an informed manner—the positions our own group takes and the

contributions it makes to the struggle.²

WHY NOT A DEMOCRATIC-CENTRALIST "PRE-PARTY"?

It would be a grave mistake to try to form another geographically dispersed, democratic-centralist organization in this period, and it was a mistake when the R.U., C.L., O.L., A.T.M., etc., each formed such organizations. The network form which we have proposed is a necessary transitional organization, before democratic centralism can be used in a geographically dispersed organization.

People who disagree and think that the organizational form adopted by the groups that later declared themselves the vanguard party was correct generally do not consider the issue of the correct form of organization open to question. In fact, most organizations which put this line into practice mention it only in passing, seeing no need to argue for it.³ Many "independents" and members of small collectives accept the same view. Their own organizational status is due only to the fact that they have been unable to find a larger, democratic-centralist organization with which they have enough agreement on line to join, on a principled basis. This incorrect line on organization is so pervasive in our movement that we consider it necessary to discuss its fallacies at some length.

To begin with, the Leninist principle on democratic centralism as a form of organization is this: communists should form a democratic-centralist party as soon as the foundations for it have been laid, not organize themselves according to democratic centralism everywhere and always. Before helping form a centralized, nationwide organization in Russia, Lenin labored to unite local Marxist circles into the *Iskra* organization. Many circles, obviously believing that the newspaper was playing a positive role, joined it and worked cooperatively to submit correspondence and distribute it, but they were not under the discipline of the editorial board. Lenin's position on the agrarian question, for example, was not binding on members of the circles linked to *Iskra* until that position became part of the party program. For another example of the *conditional* propriety of democratic centralism, the Communist Party of China, formed with only vague programmatic and tactical unity, was appropriately decentralized in the early years. Many of Mao's actions were in conflict with the line of party leadership and would have caused his expulsion from a more disciplined party, organized on the Leninist model. Later, when a much higher level of unity was achieved, the party became truly democratic centralist.

Comrades with whom we have discussed the issue of correct forms of organization in the present conditions have pointed to three reasons why they

²We go more deeply into why this is an essential condition for building unity in our pamphlet *Learning From Past Mistakes to Avoid Future Ones in the Struggle for Unity*, pp. 3-7, 10-11.

³E.g., *Revolutionary Cause*, 11/75, p. 1.

think that relatively large,⁴ democratic-centralist organizations are needed. First, they say, only this form permits us to provide coordinated, nationwide leadership of mass movements and supplies us with the agitational and propaganda materials which we need in our practice. Second, only this form permits the extensive study and investigation required for carrying out our theoretical tasks. Third, and closely related to the first two, the larger democratic-centralist form is said to be needed to develop political line by tying theory to practice, so that information on widespread experiences in the practical struggle can be summed up centrally.

The form is certainly the best for carrying out these functions, but only after the conditions for using it have been created. These conditions do not yet exist.

An organization which is geographically dispersed (i.e., not concentrated in a single locality) and applies well-developed centralism (authoritative party press, central decisions to undertake nationwide campaigns, disciplined adherence to tactical decisions of the majority or of leadership bodies, etc.) *has adopted the Leninist party form, regardless of what it calls itself and regardless of whether it is in fact the vanguard party of the working class.*⁵ This form permits most members to concentrate on trying to lead the proletarian struggle, in a unified way, for they can rely heavily on centralized ideological and practical guidance and use agitational and propaganda materials written by those who are trusted to analyze topical events in the name of the organization.

The very nature of such an organization creates three preconditions for its formation: (1) an agreed (and correct) understanding of how the organization should function internally; (2) reliable leadership, i.e., leaders who not only seem persuasive and "more developed," but who have, to at least some extent, proven their ability to solve the problems raised by revolutionary practice; and (3) agreement on the "aims and objects"⁶ of the organization, i.e., its program.

We must clarify what we mean by democratic centralism before we explain why these conditions are necessary for its proper use. Some comrades mistakenly take our rejection of premature democratic-centralism to mean that members of a local collective ought to be free to implement and propagate whatever views they wish. We see a need for *democracy* (minority submits to the majority) as soon as a group has enough unity to consider itself an organization. Democratic *centralism* means that, in addition, lower bodies

⁴Large relative to local circles or collectives, that is. Even if the entire U.S. communist movement were in a single organization, it would be far smaller than what is eventually required for an effective revolutionary party.

⁵We develop this point further in the course of this chapter and in Chapter IX, especially pp. 145-47. The reader who is unconvinced of what, in the U.S., is an unusual use of the term *party*, should bear with us and focus on the central question discussed at this point (what are the preconditions for forming a national democratic-centralist organization?), putting aside for the moment whether such organization should be called a party or not.

⁶*History of the CPSU(B)*, p. 38.

submit to higher bodies. One or more central leadership groups are set up, charged with conducting internal exchange of opinion on major questions of line, and making binding decisions for the party between its congresses. And on many lesser, but important, issues analyzed in the organization's press, those entrusted with editing the central organ publish their analyses without wide internal discussion. This centralism, which is required to produce unity of action without intolerable delays in a large organization, is what we reject, in the absence of a program, proven leadership, and unity on a correct understanding of internal party life.

Program

One of the main purposes of a program is to permit people to decide if they can submit themselves to the discipline of the party which has adopted the program. Knowledge of the agreed-on goals of an organization is essential for declaring readiness to accept its decisions.

The program of a workers' party, as we know, is a brief, scientifically formulated statement of the aims and objects of the struggle of the working class. The program defines both the ultimate goal of the revolutionary movement of the proletariat, and the demands for which the party fights while on the way to the achievement of the ultimate goal.⁷

The programme must [among other things] formulate our basic views; precisely establish our immediate political tasks; point out the immediate demands that must show the area of agitational activity. . . .⁸

Any comrade, in order to subordinate himself or herself to the decisions of a large organization and its leadership, must know that members of the organization are agreed on the "aims and objects," the "basic views," "immediate political tasks," "immediate demands," etc.⁹ The organizational manual of the CPUSA published in 1935 stressed this relationship between programmatic agreement and acceptance of discipline: "Party discipline is observed by the Party members and Party organizations because only those who agree with the program of the Communist Party and the C.I. [Communist International] can become members of the Party."¹⁰

It was our analysis of how to organize U.S. communists who can agree on the situation and our tasks that first led us to conclude that a program is needed for unification into a democratic-centralist organization, but some study showed us that this conclusion is also orthodox Leninism. Lenin struggled for years to win the Russian Marxists to the need for forming what we now call a Leninist party. But his polemics were for the formation of a democratic-centralist party *as soon as the development of the movement permitted it*. The 1898 founding congress of the RSDLP failed to create anything different from the previously

⁷Ibid.

⁸"A Draft Programme of Our Party," LCW 4: 230.

⁹We gave examples of major programmatic questions on p. 21, above.

¹⁰Peters, *The Communist Party: A Manual on Organization* (1975 Proletarian Publishers' reprint), p. 23. See also SW 1: 65.

existing autonomous circles. For several years after this Congress, Lenin *opposed* the convening of a second congress to try to unify them into a genuine democratic-centralist party. That congress did not take place until 1903. First it was necessary to use *Iskra* (a newspaper Lenin founded) to unite the Social-Democrats ideologically around the correct lines on "the aims and objects of the Party" and to "ascertain what sort of a party was wanted."¹¹ This is the context of the oft-quoted statement from the *Declaration of the Editorial Board of Iskra* (1900):

Before we can unite, and in order that we may unite, we must first of all draw firm and definite lines of demarcation. Otherwise our unity will be purely fictitious, it will conceal the prevailing confusion and hinder its radical elimination.¹²

One of the preconditions for organizational unity of the local circles was consolidation around a program:

At the present time [1899] the urgent question of our movement is no longer that of developing the former scattered "amateur" activities, but of uniting—of organization. *This is a step for which a programme is a necessity.*¹³

To establish and consolidate the Party means to establish and consolidate unity among all Russian Social-Democrats, and, for the reasons indicated above, such unity cannot be decreed, it cannot be brought about by a decision, say, of a meeting of representatives; it must be worked for. In the first place, it is necessary to work for solid ideological unity which should eliminate discordance and confusion that—let us be frank!—reign among Russian Social-Democrats at the present time. This ideological unity must be consolidated by a Party programme.¹⁴

Before there was programmatic unity, Lenin certainly did not ignore the work of establishing contacts with different Social-Democratic circles. In fact, by the time *Iskra* was established, one of its aims was to build practical organization through its channels of correspondence and distribution. Lenin was *not*, however, struggling then to get the circles to join in a big democratic-centralist organization. The struggle for that form of organization was the struggle for how the party itself should be organized.

Lenin's explanation of the need to include "the programme question" in the polemics of the day (1899) makes it clear that one of the purposes of the program is to establish what must be agreed on for comrades to be members of the same unified, disciplined organization:

... [I]f the polemic [over differences of opinion among the Social-Democrats] is not to be fruitless, if it is not to degenerate into a personal rivalry, if it is not to lead to a confusion of views, to a confounding of enemies and friends, it is absolutely essential that the question of the programme be introduced into the polemic. The polemic will be of benefit only if it makes clear in what the differences actually consist, *how profound they are*, whether they are differences of substance or differences on partial questions, whether or not these differences interfere with

¹¹*History of the CPSU(B)*, pp. 30-33, 38-39. (We note these pages not just for the quoted phrases; they also outline the history we have just stated.)

¹²LCW 4: 354.

¹³"A Draft Programme. . .," LCW 4: 230 (emphasis added).

¹⁴*Declaration of the Editorial Board*. . . , p. 354.

common work in the ranks of one and the same party. *Only* the introduction of the programme question into the polemic, only a definite statement by the two polemicising parties on their *programmatic* views, can provide an answer to all these questions, questions that insistently demand an answer. The elaboration of a common program for the Party should not, of course, put an end to all polemics; it will firmly establish those basic views on the character, the aim, and the tasks of our movement which must serve as the banner of a fighting party, a party that remains consolidated and united despite partial differences of opinion among its members on partial questions.¹⁵

Finally, if any doubt remains on Lenin's views of what it takes to unite separate local circles into a disciplined organization, this passage from *One Step Forward, Two Steps Back* should lay it to rest:

As long as we had no unity on the fundamental questions of programme and tactics, we bluntly admitted that we were living in a period of disunity and separate circles, we bluntly declared that before we could unite, lines of demarcation must be drawn; we did not even talk of the forms of a joint organization, but exclusively discussed the new (at that time they really were new) problems of fighting opportunism on programme and tactics. At present, as we all agree, this fight has already produced a sufficient degree of unity, as formulated in the Party programme and the Party resolutions on tactics; we had to take the next step, and, by common consent, we did take it, working out the *forms* of a united organization that would merge all the circles together.¹⁶

To sum up: Lenin demanded that the Russian Social-Democrats organize themselves professionally in a single, nationwide, disciplined, democratic-centralist party; but he insisted that in order to do so, they had to struggle for agreement on a program. The fact that those U.S. organizations without programs do not call themselves parties is not the issue. What matters is not the label but the reality. And these groups, as well as the admitted parties, prematurely adopted the form of a centralized organization to which comrades *should* subordinate their independent views only because of programmatic unity.

The "pre-party" parties in this country reversed Lenin's position on the formation of a democratic-centralist organization requiring unity on a program. As we said to the CPUSA/M-L recently,

Rather than a program being required for building a united organization on a principled basis, the MLOC's political bureau has written us that "a correct program. . . can only arise out of the protracted struggle of a democratic centralist, national organization to organize the proletariat and its allies against the U.S. bourgeoisie and to combat opportunism."

Instead of developing its program in open polemics that took up in a systematic way those programmatic questions which are controversial among U.S.

¹⁵"A Draft Programme. . .," LCW 4: 231.

¹⁶LCW 7: 385.

Lenin often used the term *tactics* as we generally use *strategy* now. (See, e.g., his *Two Tactics of Social Democracy in the Democratic Revolution*, or the synopsis of it in *History of the CPSU(B)*, pp. 65-69.) We do think that unity on the strategy for revolution is required in a party or party-like organization. We follow the example of the party rules of the RSDLP and other parties in not stating this as a separate requirement for party membership because the program itself should state the party's strategic plan.

communists, the MLOC—again like the other parties—elaborated much of its line through a process of its leadership determining the answers and its rank and file accepting them.

This has caused at least three undesirable results. First, whether by intention or not, comrades have received several years' training in giving little credence to the views of communists outside your organization who differ with you. Second, despite a program which is certainly Marxist-Leninist overall, there remain in it a few fundamental, and very serious, opportunist errors. They are on matters for which the MLOC leadership seems to have a blind spot. But an open, serious, organized political struggle—like the several years of struggle that preceded the Russian Marxists' adoption of a program—[might] have produced a clear majority for the correct line.

Third, the absence of such an open struggle in our movement, with polemics printed and debates held in a manner that all ordinary communist activists could follow them, has perpetuated our disunity. Large numbers of comrades who accept one or another opportunist line have never been forced to examine their own views in the light of a serious challenge to them.¹⁷

What was substituted for unity on program when today's parties originally adopted the democratic-centralist party form was, in most cases, agreement on general principles of Marxism-Leninism, common rejection of opportunist lines of pre-existing organizations, some *general* agreement on the immediate tasks facing communists, unity on *a few* questions of political line, and—too often—white chauvinism or narrow nationalism.¹⁸

And this is only the optimal situation. For many comrades, this level of unity was not based on any conscious attempt to analyze these questions objectively. The line agreement which they developed with the organization which they were in or close to was, too often, not the product of a struggle to study opposing lines as well and look for the truth. Rather, it came mainly from a desire to see those to whom one is already close and who seem honest to be the true revolutionaries, and to join their organization. Moreover, as most of us first learned about Marxism-Leninism, "our understanding of M-L-MTTT was shaped by the organization we had the most contact with," as the authors of the pamphlet *The Degeneration of PRRWO: From Revolutionary Organization to Neo-Trotskyite Sect* point out.¹⁹ When we let line unity develop in this

¹⁷*Party-Formation and the Circle Spirit: A Reply to the MLOC*, p. 3.

¹⁸Most such groups did develop such unity around program and tactics fairly rapidly *after formation*. They did so, however, much less through study and struggle than through total reliance on leadership, with the rank and file only learning to "defend the line." The ability of groups that now call themselves parties to adopt their explicit programs with very little struggle reflects the fact that these programs belatedly summed up lines that had long been put forward in the parties' publications.

¹⁹(P. 2.) And point out, and point out. . . . This pamphlet by former PRRWO members is valuable, but it fails to analyze the *internal* basis for comrades' acceptance of an opportunist line. Consequently it provides little guidance for avoiding similar problems, instead observing that the CPUSA's revisionism left "a vacuum of ideological eclecticism," which made the emergence of incorrect lines "only natural" (p. 9). Erroneous lines are "only natural" because of the *pressure* of bourgeois and petty bourgeois ideology, and because the social base of our movement makes most of us particularly receptive to such ideology.

Recognizing this fact means that whenever an idea seems correct, we must ask

manner, we fail to grasp that

[o]ur comrades. . . should take a sniff at everything and distinguish the good from the bad before they decide whether to welcome it or boycott it. Communists must always go into the whys and wherefores of anything, use their own heads and carefully think over whether or not it corresponds to reality and is really well founded; on no account should they follow blindly and encourage slavishness.²⁰

But even *principled* unity based on general ideological principles, a view of other organizations in the movement, and general agreement on party-building tasks and a few issues of political line is not sufficient. We can see this concretely by returning to the question which is immediately before us, that of the correct form of organization for the "independent" individuals and collectives in the communist movement who can agree on our tasks for this period. Certainly many of us who do not accept any existing party as being on the correct path can, through the current polemics, agree generally on the errors of those organizations and on our own tasks. Should we form a new centralized organization (or, if we found an existing one with the same line, should we merge into it)? After all, while such an organization would not have a program for proletarian revolution, it would at least be able to unite on a program for its work in building the party, i.e., for its work in the immediate period. And, as the P.U.L. points out, the struggle for this kind of program would give us a fairly firm foundation of ideological unity.²¹ For we can make a good start at learning the Marxist stand, viewpoint, and method in thorough struggle over several critical questions facing the movement, without having completed that struggle on even a majority of such questions.

No, this is not enough for a larger, democratic-centralist organization. For agreement on our tasks in this period would include agreement on the need for practical work in the proletariat. There is no consensus yet on how extensive such work should be today, but there is near-unanimity that some level of practice is required. But a party form of organization is useful only when there is agreement on the *content* of that practice as well.

Comrades who disagree with us on the ability of a looser organization of collectives to carry out our tasks in this period invariably point to the pressing need for the agitational and propaganda materials of the sort that only the larger, preferably nationwide, democratic-centralist organizations can provide, with their newspapers and journals. It is true that communists in small collectives cannot develop on our own the agitational and propaganda materials which we need for our local practice. What we need—short of the party itself—is an organizational form linking these collectives which will permit all of us to examine the materials produced by other groups in our network and use or adapt those which we think are good. Moreover, we would

whether it does so because it puts a Marxist cover on the alien ideology that we each bring to this movement, or because an all-sided analysis of its practical effects shows that it will serve the proletariat. Forgetting to ask this question, comrades in and close to the existing parties do not critically examine what they are taught, once they accept centralist leadership.

²⁰"Rectify the Party's Style of Work," MSR 227.

²¹P.U.L., p. 201.

be foolishly sectarian not to cull the literature produced by the existing parties and use what we agree with in that literature. But there is only one way to have a publication or publications which consistently put out agitational and propaganda materials with which we agree, on the questions which we must discuss in our practice (e.g., the international situation; the current state of, and trends in the development of, U.S. capitalism; the relationships of concretely described classes to each other in this society; strata in the working class; tactics in the trade union struggle; the different national questions; etc.). The ability to rely on publications about these topics *presupposes* that the analyses printed flow from programmatic unity on the questions taken up. Our collective is as hungry as anyone else for a regular source of reliable agitational and propaganda materials based on current U.S. reality, but there is no organizational shortcut for creating such a source. If someone else edits these publications, our group can use them only to the extent that we agree with the line put forward on each topic. If we edit them, anyone else's use of them would be subject to the same limitations.²²

Where do Correct Leaders Come From? Do They Fall From the Sky?

This matter of who does the editing brings us to the second condition for the establishment of a dispersed democratic-centralist organization, or party: the development of proven ideological and practical leaders whom we can elect to the central bodies. Democratic centralism is a division of labor. Comrades on the leading bodies, though bound by a program and by the decisions of occasional congresses, are responsible for analyzing and synthesizing the work reports and statements of views of numerous party members and party organizations, along with all available data about current political, economic, and social events and trends, and propagating the correct Marxist-Leninist line on the questions to which the rank and file of the party must respond in their practical work.

. . . [T]he newspaper can and should be the *ideological* leader of the Party, evolving theoretical truths, tactical principles, general organizational ideas, and the general tasks of the whole Party at any given moment.²³

Further, the "direct *practical* leader of the movement" (which, under Russian conditions, had to be a committee separate from the ideological leadership), should, in Lenin's view at least, have the duties of

maintaining *personal* connections with all the committees, embracing all the best revolutionary forces among The Russian Social-Democrats, and *managing* all the general affairs of the Party, such as the distribution of literature, the issuing of leaflets, the allocation of forces, the appointment of individuals and groups to take charge of special undertakings, the preparation of demonstrations and an uprising

²²We certainly are not ruling out the development of joint literary forms for disseminating materials based on *various* lines and for providing the form and an agenda for struggling out line differences. Lenin's *Iskra* played at least the latter role, and obviously to good effect. But when it did, it by no means claimed to be the central organ of a democratic-centralist organization, with members of circles working in the *Iskra* organization pledged in advance to propagate the views its editors put forward.

²³*Letter to a Comrade on Our Organizational Tasks*, LCW 6: 234.

on an all-Russian scale, etc.²⁴

A well-functioning party should provide plenty of channels for internal struggle throughout the organization, channels which clearly seem missing from the existing parties. But it must also be capable of responding rapidly, in a unified way, to changing conditions. Moreover, its members should be able to obtain written agitation and propaganda from bodies which they can rely on, rather than having to study and independently analyze every new development in the class struggle.

The relationship between centralism and democracy needs a great deal of further study and struggle, but major deviations are identifiable now. One is the bureaucratic centralism and lack of open internal struggle of the existing parties, where a slavish attitude toward the positions promoted by leadership on controversial questions is strongly encouraged. Even many programmatic issues, left open at the time the group adopted democratic centralism, have been "handed down" by leaders without any serious opportunity for the rank and file to study alternatives and engage in struggle. The other deviation, which is usually expressed in comrades' criticisms of the bureaucratic centralism of the parties, is an idealized concept of full internal discussion, on every new development, before anything appears in the press or any decisions are made and implemented on the party's position. The fact that full use of democratic centralism does mean a division of labor that entrusts serious ideological and practical responsibilities to leadership is why communists' ability to identify reliable leaders is another precondition for use of the democratic-centralist party form.

Assignments to leadership cannot successfully be made at random, of course, nor is it satisfactory to simply let those who took the initiative in building the organization evolve into its ideological and practical leadership. For there are few people who can fulfill these responsibilities well, and it takes experience for them to develop. Furthermore, they can only be judged by those who must elect them after the rank and file have seen their work, while they acquired that experience.

"Political parties," and the same would apply to any organization structured along party lines, "as a general rule, are run by more or less stable groups composed of the most authoritative, influential, and experienced members, who are elected to the most responsible positions, and are called leaders."²⁵ In "running a secret organisation," they retain "*leadership* of the whole movement, not by virtue of having the power, of course, but by virtue of authority, energy, greater experience, greater versatility, and greater talent."²⁶

Our movement will produce such people, and they need not be Lenins or Maos before we can elect a central committee. Some leaders *might* be developing in the parties which exist today. Others will come forward in the course of the theoretical and practical struggles of a party-building network. As they do, and as other conditions for forming the party are created, we will

²⁴Ibid.

²⁵"Left-Wing" Communism. . . , LCW 31: 41.

²⁶Letter to a Comrade. . . , LCW 6: 240.

know who they are from the role they play in creating those conditions.²⁷ But comrades should not be *relying* on a few apparently more developed comrades to provide ideological and practical leadership that can be accepted with a high level of confidence, without having seen that leadership tested in struggle. Hence our conclusion that not only a program, but a history that produces leaders and permits us to identify them, is a prerequisite for the adoption of the democratic-centralist form of organization.

The leadership question is the one we pose to those who believe that a geographically dispersed, democratic-centralist organization is necessary for the development of political line by uniting theory with practice. For example, the Workers Party for Proletarian Socialism, which to its credit has stated its views on this point openly, writes,

To correctly put into practice the mass line and to raise perceptual knowledge to a rational level require a democratic-centralist organization. . . . It is the blending of skills and the organization of human activity in continuous mass practice *and* theoretical development that provide the mechanism for the creation of new knowledge and the articulation of perceptual knowledge into rational knowledge—usable to a revolutionary party in service to the people. In an overall sense, the division of an organization into levels corresponds to a division of labor according to the different stages in the theory of knowledge.

How does the mass line function? Highly trained on-line (working) militants and cadres perform accurate investigation of the objective and subjective conditions in the area where they are working. This perceptual knowledge is summarized and passed to the next cadre level. The higher up in the organization the knowledge is passed, the more it becomes integrated with knowledge from numbers of other units, being constantly systematized and summed up as it goes. At the level of the Center, the perceptual understanding of numbers of units is integrated with world-historical knowledge including Marxist-Leninist theory (which in its turn came from the summing up of world revolutionary practice). The result is rational knowledge. . . . By this division of labor, by the assignment of the best organizers to do on-line work and the best theoreticians with a good class standpoint to process knowledge, we can achieve unity of practice and theory—praxis [sic].

. . . Thus a democratic-centralist organization, by its very structure, has the potentiality to resolve the contradiction between knowing and doing, theory and practice. It has the capacity to generate and implement lines.

. . . Now, compare the profound capacity of a democratic-centralist formation with the amorphous, undefined and uncontrolled nature of the party-building movement.

. . . Where is the capacity for scientific method? Where is the division of labor? Where is the ability to process knowledge, to unify practice and theory?²⁸

Knowledge does develop from a lower to a higher level, of course. If our movement encourages the widest circulation of reports on our investigations and our experiences in practice, some comrades—among the many who try—will be able to take the largely perceptual knowledge contained in these reports, study the data in light of the historical experience of the proletariat and real familiarity with current conditions, and raise the knowledge thus gained to a rational level and help us answer some of the burning questions

²⁷We should not know them by their real names, of course. There is no point in facilitating their arrests at the point when the bourgeoisie finds that communism in this country is too dangerous to retain its legal status.

²⁸*Proletarian Socialism*, Vol. 1, 5/77, pp. 62-63.

facing our movement. Polemical struggles between proponents of differing "answers" will help produce the correct line. In addition, these struggles, in conjunction with the further practical experience of the movement, should eventually win over the majority of honest comrades to the correct line. *That* is the kind of "lower to higher" that we are capable of in this period.

The difference between this process and that of the best form for a party is not as great as WPPS's picture of a multi-tiered data-processing mechanism suggests. Lenin opposed having several levels of organization interfering with the two-way flow of information and directives between leading bodies and basic party units. We think that he was correct in arguing that, to get the broadest national view, the central leadership needs the summations of local party committees and a large sampling of reports from those most directly involved in practice.²⁹ Interspersing a lot of intermediate summation steps, as WPPS proposes, would only dilute the accuracy of the information received by the leadership.

So the question is, can we now carry out a division of labor in which one reliable center evaluates these reports from basic local units and, in the main, develops the line for all of us, freeing the rest of us to devote most of our attention to implementing it? Or do we, lacking both that leadership and the program that we have democratically accepted as setting out the basic political line already, need to spread the functions much more until the basis for centralization develops?

The movement has already proved wrong the WPPS call for this "division of labor, by the assignment of the best organizers to do on-line work and the best theoreticians with a good class standpoint to process knowledge."³⁰ The proof is the opportunist leadership of the many parties—declared and otherwise—which have tried to do this. No doubt their leaders *seemed* capable to those who chose and accepted them. Yet their work has produced massively divergent results, none of which represents consistent Marxism. The same will be true of the work of our network of local circles for a painful period, *but the difference is that we will not pretend otherwise and designate one of them as a higher body which guides the others.*

We will return later to the question of how leadership can be evaluated, as well as the *informal* leading role that some forces will undoubtedly emerge to fulfill.

²⁹*Letter to a Comrade*. . . . See also the Comintern's *Principles of Party Organization* (Mass Publications: Calcutta), p. 38.

³⁰*Proletarian Socialism*, p. 63. We rely on WPPS's arguments because they are the only organization which, to our knowledge, has tried to defend the use of democratic centralism before the preconditions for its use have been met. Others holding similar views would probably not use such unusual expressions as "processing knowledge" to describe the role of leadership. But they should. Only this image of those with sharpest mental tools for mechanically "processing knowledge" permits WPPS to avoid the question of how our movement can develop and identify *politically reliable* leadership.

A Third Condition for Democratic Centralism: A Grasp of Organizational Principles

Comrades uniting in an organization must agree on how that organization will function. Is the Party of Labor of Albania correct in opposing the very concept of two-line struggle within a party? To what extent do deviations require expulsions, and to what extent can they be handled through ideological struggle? How could revisionists become so powerful in a Chinese party that had a revolutionary leading line? For that matter, how has it happened that, in party after party, full revisionist degeneration, not rebellion from below, has followed the emergence of revisionist leadership?

Was Lenin correct in insisting that party minorities should have representation on leading bodies and free access to party journals, to struggle for their views,³¹ or was his position a relic of a pre-Bolshevization period? How much of the party's resources should be devoted to the theoretical training of rank and file members? What does it mean that Lenin spoke both of "an organization of professional revolutionaries" and of a "mass party" in describing the party? How are we to apply his statements that a party's membership policies and methods of organization should vary under different conditions? Should there be any difference between the organizational status of proletarian and non-proletarian members of the party? How can the party encourage the development of those of its minority and women members who would otherwise be less confident and less developed theoretically? How can it help remold the outlooks of its intellectuals?

To a large extent, of course, the answers to these and similar questions will be worked out satisfactorily only as we gain the experience of working in a party. On the other hand, failure to take such questions up consciously as part of the struggle to unite in a party would invite extremely harmful errors, either those committed by the existing U.S. parties (suppression of internal struggle, slavish attitudes of the rank and file towards leadership, theoretical underdevelopment of the rank and file) or, in reaction to the deviations of the other organizations, errors of ultra-democracy, organizational looseness, and lack of discipline.

Considering both the triumph of revisionism in almost all of the original communist parties and what appear to be the grave organizational errors of the anti-revisionist parties in the U.S., these questions of internal party life should be treated with the utmost seriousness prior to party-formation.

The Experience of the "Pre-Party" Parties

Our objections to premature adoption of the party form of organization are not based solely on Lenin's opinions and our own logic. Our movement's experience has provided ample proof of where the incorrect line on organization can lead. It is no accident that every one of the existing parties manifests such a high level of opportunism, including "left" sectarianism, in most cases. Not that all their opportunism flows from their line on organization; if anything, the same "get-rich-quick" desires and methods of

³¹*One Step Forward, Two Steps Back*, LCW 7: 347 ff.; *To the Party*, *ibid.*, p. 458.

solving problems that led to immediate adoption of the party form lead as well to opportunist handling of many other areas of their work. But their solution to the problem of organization dialectically reinforces opportunism in many other areas.

Groups which decided to organize themselves like parties from the beginning naturally have tried to function as parties (R.U.'s early "Build the mass movement," or the later insistence of many others on focusing practically all their resources on broad mass work). Their belief that they already have the leadership, the line, and the press that the communist movement needs strengthens their inclination to engage in polemics aimed at justifying their separate existence and trying to get all communists to join them, rather than polemics aimed at helping an entire movement settle the questions facing it. And their rank and file, trained to "accept leadership" rather than use their own heads in a particularly confused and divided movement, slavishly "defend the line" rather than read others' polemics and struggle with an open mind. The choice to work as a party reinforces their blindness to the difficult tasks that must be carried out before a real Marxist-Leninist party can be formed.

Finally, it is no accident that, after a few years on this "left" sectarian path of acting like the party, they wake up one day to the realization that they *are* The Party and need only to reduce their program to writing and change their name.

We have been asked whether we think that the existing parties should disband, particularly since by now they are undoubtedly satisfied that they have met the preconditions we list. This is a moot point, because they do not care what we think about whether they should disband. For the record, however, yes, the interests of the proletariat would best be served by their disbanding and their members joining a party-building network, because each party is now under the hegemony of an opportunist line. A more likely possibility for breaking this hegemony is that, after several years, the forces who do form a network will have a strong enough organization to propose a "unity committee" to one or more of the parties. We would challenge them to forms of struggle in which the rank and file of all groups will be exposed to the polemics. (Such a challenge would be accepted, of course, only under conditions favoring unity that do not exist today.) We go further into the question of unity with other communists in a later chapter.

To return to the subject at hand, we want to emphasize that those of us not about to join the existing parties must not make the mistake of rushing to form an undeclared one of our own. It would be equally vulnerable to opportunism, since we have neither a program, nor leadership that we know to be developed and tested, not just impressive but careerist, nor assurance that we have learned the lessons of historical experience in the application of democratic centralism.

We agree completely that the democratic-centralist form, the party form, is best *in general* for systematically gathering and evaluating information on a nationwide basis, as well as for testing lines in practice on a broad scale. Failure to have such a party holds back the development of political line, as it holds back all our work. But, again, there are no shortcuts; we will not develop that line by entrusting the duties of developing it to comrades who are a few

months ahead of the rest of us in adopting and propagating what seems to be a correct analysis of the current situation and our tasks, any more than the existing organizations have succeeded in doing so by that means.

Impatient adoption of the party form before conditions for it had been prepared is another serious example of widespread ultra-leftism in party-building line. What communists must do is build the pre-party organization that can prepare those conditions.³²

CAN WE ACCOMPLISH OUR TASKS IN SUCH AN ORGANIZATION?

The fact that the organization we propose will still be composed of local circles with some autonomy leaves some comrades with whom we have discussed these ideas deeply concerned.

Some, unduly overwhelmed by the immensity of our theoretical tasks, say that only a large organization, organized along party lines, can carry out those tasks. "If one's line is correct," said Chou En-lai, "even if one has not a single soldier at first, there will be soldiers. . . ." The obverse, however, is not true: it does not take a whole army to develop the correct line. As we pointed out earlier, the roles played by Lenin and Mao in analyzing their societies and charting the revolutionary path show that even a single tremendously talented and energetic person can make a tremendous contribution, even if it is not perfect. We see no such leaders in our movement today, but the combined work of a number of people, even in only a pre-party network, can lead to a qualitative leap in the application of science to an analysis of the U.S.

Moreover, local collectives—linked together as we have described—actually have strengths for this kind of work. Our inability to rely on central bodies to provide us with ideological leadership means that now, even more than in the future, comrades need to "use their own heads" in considering questions of theory and line. Local, fairly small groups are particularly well suited to letting all members sit down in a room and struggle for the correct line on questions being considered.

Local units of a party-type organization are the form reflecting a commitment to discuss, implement, and report on the effectiveness of the line coming from leadership. In contrast, autonomous local organizations are the form reflecting a commitment to take equal responsibility for trying to develop and evaluate theory and political line. They encourage individual members to see their role in developing the views that will be circulated with the circle's name on them.

³²As to the question of whether democratic centralism should be used in *local* organizations, we do not know. Obviously those that are too large to have frequent plenary meetings and which have comrades involved in a number of areas of work need separate units and a coordinating body. The responsibilities delegated to the coordinating body would depend entirely on the organization's level of unity and on the known abilities of comrades available to take up some leadership functions. In general, we think that leadership should be entrusted with propagating and implementing positions that have been agreed on by the organization. As the group takes up new major issues, however, it should take a position only after full internal study and discussion. Leading comrades should, of course, help frame the issues, organize the struggle, and advocate positions.

They also permit development of a higher level of internal unity than should be required of a party. A party can handle a broad range of important tactical disagreements, as long as there is programmatic agreement, open and aboveboard struggle, and adherence to discipline in testing the lines decided on by leadership or party congresses. But at a time when our tasks are like Lenin's tasks of studying the society and charting the path for its revolutionary transformation—always in the course of participating in the practical struggle—collectives undertaking this work, or at least those which will emerge to play leading roles, need to be able to develop something closer to the unity of will and outlook that Lenin had within himself.

At the same time, we need the freedom of action that he had. In order for the correct lines to emerge, we need to "let a hundred flowers bloom," understanding, of course, that the purpose of open debate is to permit us to close ranks around the *correct* line. Though we should coordinate the work and organize the struggle according to an agenda of topics, we should not divide labor in a centralist way and set up discipline that would convert the local units into rank-and-file groups of mainly "practical workers." For then they could not take the initiative in developing particular views on their own, studying questions which they believe must be investigated, and publishing what they think. All of these are required if we are not to stifle the emergence of correct lines in a period when recognized leadership has yet to develop.

Getting into the habit of having this kind of internal unity and freedom of action has its dangers. Presumably part of the appeal of the circle spirit lies in the fact that this form of organization requires less discipline than a party does. Disagreement with a line is dealt with face-to-face, not by writing a letter to leadership in a distant city, hoping that they will grasp the point being made, and being satisfied with only a written reply or a statement in the newspaper responding generally to similar views being raised by a number of comrades. There is usually room for more prolonged debate aimed at consolidating all to the same view of a question, less settling of matters by vote.³³ And many will prefer our very inability to designate some as leaders of a party, and the greater equality of local units and individuals, to the "cog-in-a-machine" status which most of us will have once we are able to put together an organized party.

For these reasons, the organizational form which we are proposing is not well suited for helping comrades learn that the unity of Marxist-Leninists in a single party, with the necessary subordination of the minority to the majority and lower bodies to higher bodies, is more important than each of us being able to do what we think is correct in every situation. Failure to learn this well could only lead to the perpetual fragmentation of our movement, and continual splits in those organizations which do form.

However, the fact that small circles favor the growth of small-circle spirit does not permit us to deny that we are in a period when a network of circles is the best we are capable of organizing, in order to effect the transition to a democratic-centralist party. A comparison with a different problem makes this

³³However, we have found that this "room for debate" can be illusory, too, even in a very small group. Sometimes we have spent too much time seeking unanimity, when we should have been testing a majority view and going on to discuss other questions.

point clearer. Stalin wrote that periods of legality and tranquility tend to create a danger of rightism and reformist illusions in the party. This does not, of course, mean that in such times communists should adopt tactics appropriate for periods of crisis and revolutionary upsurge, in order to escape the right danger. Similarly, in a period when the appropriate level of organization is a pre-party network of local circles, what we can do about the circle spirit is recognize the danger, particularly in light of the "left" sectarianism which permeates many communists' attitudes towards each other, and struggle against it.

Are Polemics Useful? (Or is Unity Impossible?)

Another objection to organizing in a network has come from comrades who think that unity can be built only in common practice. Objectively, this means building only local organizations. Comrades we know who hold this view cite the past failure of written polemics and verbal struggles to lead to much unity, and they conclude that debate has little value in settling questions.

It is true, of course, that some comrades, through a combination of opportunism and plain confusion, are so wedded to incorrect lines that they truly will be unable to see that they are wrong before experience, perhaps several years of it, proves them wrong. And there are undoubtedly die-hard opportunists who will never change their ways. However, the conclusion that polemics are fruitless overall is correct only if it is narrowed to the unfavorable conditions which have prevailed so far. It is certainly true when the polemicists resort to every bourgeois debater's trick to try to prove the total correctness of their lines and discredit their opponents entirely. Further, no worthwhile results are obtained when comrades consider other views to be so *self-evidently* opportunist that they do not develop the polemic beyond throwing out a few arguments that will serve to arm the faithful. In addition, as long as democratic-centralist organizations insulate their rank and file from the polemics by persuading them that only their own press could possibly give the correct Marxist-Leninist point of view, we are often engaged in entirely futile struggles with opportunist leaders. Finally, many polemics have been between two incorrect lines, each of which strengthened the credibility of the other for its own adherents (e.g., the R.U./Black Workers Congress struggle on the Black national question, the A.T.M./Revolutionary Wing struggle on the E.R.A., and—in our opinion—the struggle on the international situation several years ago, when the main lines were those of the *Guardian* and the October League.)

Bad polemics, steadfast attachment to opportunist lines, slavishness within democratic-centralist organizations, and contests between two one-sided lines have given the movement enough bad experience with line struggle to make unwillingness to engage in "mere debates" understandable. But such unwillingness is incorrect just the same. Volumes of polemics written by every great Marxist since Marx himself attest to the fact that these leaders found that many erring comrades could be persuaded by writings based on reason, historical experience, and current facts. How could "the wide circulation of" *What is to be Done?* bring about "a complete ideological defeat for

economism," ending the doctrine's considerable influence in Russia,³⁴ if arguments and polemics are just an idealist way of trying to win people over? Those who can form a trend within the movement that will initiate the building of a genuine vanguard party will have to learn to use polemics to teach and learn, or we will not unite for decades, as we each do our testing in practice of our own ideas. Obviously our practical experiences will play an important role in helping us judge the correctness of each others' arguments on various questions, as will the demonstrable experience of other comrades. But we must not shrink from line struggle as not being worth the effort. This would be just another form of sectarianism, of going our own ways and perpetuating our fragmentation.

OTHER POSITIONS ON THE QUESTION OF ORGANIZATION

A Network Adrift

The Movement for a Revolutionary Left has put forward an organizational plan that is a step forward from separate small circles waiting for a party to develop, but only a small step. They call, as do we, for a national organization that is looser than a democratic-centralist party. But they see it mainly as a form where we will *wait* for communist unity to somehow develop. Those "who share a general anti-reformist/anti-ultraleftist perspective" can join, and their unity will develop as

most people sum up the meaning of their experiences [in mass work] in the same way. . . . Gradually as experience was gained, and the unity of most of the people in the association rose organically on the basis of mutual trust and collective wisdom achieved on the basis of struggling together, a genuine pre-party organization would emerge.³⁵

With no attempt at justification, here is classic rightist fear both of narrowing our forces to those who have a common purpose and plan and of intervening consciously in the course of events that they hope will spontaneously produce unity around a correct line. But just as bourgeois ideology makes workers sum up their experience erroneously all too often, there is no reason on earth to assume that without systematic and collective study and struggle, "most people" will arrive at the correct lines on all the burning questions facing us simply by summing up their own experiences. To this fallacy the M.R.L. adds the truism that "[p]atience is a virtue and we must take as long as necessary to achieve both the experience and consensus necessary to create an organization with a serious potential for becoming a party," and turns it into an unrevolutionary willingness to wait forever in the hopes that the spontaneous forces of history will eventually do our party-building work for us.

What U.S. imperialism has in store for the people of the world is too ghastly for us to adopt the M.R.L.'s brand of patience.

³⁴*History of the CPSU(B)*, pp. 37-38.

³⁵*A Critique of Ultra-Leftism, Dogmatism and Sectarianism*, pp. 86-87.

The OCIC

Other comrades close to the Organizing Committee for an Ideological Center have asked us how our proposal for a pre-party network differs from the "ideological center" they seek to develop, since they see real similarities. In part we do not know, because the OCIC has yet to develop an explicit party-building plan. Rather than forming a pre-party organization united on its tasks and ways of accomplishing them, they have grouped those who agree on a certain view of the international situation and who have some unity on a view of the communist movement. But this decision itself implies some serious differences between us and them on party-building, differences we examine in our next chapter, which takes up the question of who should unite in joint party-building work. On the other hand, whatever real similarities there are between our proposals and views of some OCIC members are, we think, a good thing. Any such similarities also cast doubt on the premise that using the international situation to "demarcate" the party-building forces is useful, if comrades from entirely different sections of the movement are arriving at similar conclusions on the current tasks of communists.

The Iskra Plan

Other comrades have pointed out some resemblance between our network proposal and the Workers Congress's "*Iskra* plan." The W.C. plan is, by their own admission, a carbon copy of Lenin's solution to the problems of disorganization and ideological disunity prevailing among the Russian Marxist circles in 1900. Lenin was the motive force behind the founding of a national newspaper (*Iskra*), the purposes of which were to break through the local perspective of the various circles by providing Marxist analysis of national and international political and economic events; serve as a forum for struggle over differences (by opening its columns to all contributors) and, in particular, promote the correct line on disputed questions; permit the sharing of experiences; and develop the organizational techniques of secret communications, smuggling, etc., that would be needed for an illegal party to function in autocratic Russia. The Workers Congress offers its newspaper, *The Communist*, for the same functions here, and continually urges comrades to contribute to it and see it as their own paper.

We stated our disagreements with this plan in an article we submitted to *The Communist*:

. . . [T]he W.C.'s "*Iskra* plan". . . must depend on conditions here being comparable to those existing in Russia at the turn of the century, when *Iskra* met the needs of the Russian Marxists. For certainly the use of an *Iskra*-type newspaper in party-building is not a universal principle of Marxism-Leninism. Of the other parties whose history we have read (the C.P.C., the P.L.A., and the Vietnam Workers Party), none used such a tool. As the Proletarian Unity League asked the W.C. some time ago, "Why didn't the Third International alert the Albanians, or the Koreans, or others, to this 'right opportunist' deviation?"*

. . . [W]e can identify some important features of the Russian situation that are

*P.U.L., p. 107.

absent today:

1) There were enough advanced workers for Lenin to demand the establishment of a newspaper at a level that would meet their needs, and we mean "advanced" according to the "Retrograde Trend" definition. Behind them was a "broad stratum" of intermediate workers, who were also socialists and participated in agitation. It was largely to meet the needs of such workers, and to benefit from their written contributions, that the paper was needed.

2) There was no national communist press to inform Marxist and other socialist workers about issues that went beyond narrow local concerns, or to permit the sharing of experience. Here *The Communist* is but one of many papers trying to play the role of *Iskra*.

3) We do not know how the editors of *The Communist* conceive of themselves, but in our opinion the U.S. communist movement has yet to develop ideological leaders with anything near Lenin's consistent grasp of Marxism. Accordingly, no newspaper can play the guiding role in clearing up ideological confusion here that *Iskra* did in Russia, or in consistently providing "political exposure which trains proletarian leaders and the oppressed masses to systematically appraise all aspects of political life. . . . (*Communist*, 6/6/77, p. 2.)

4) By the time he launched *Iskra*, Lenin had completed major theoretical investigations of Russian social development that assisted him and others to "systematically appraise" topical events. Our movement, lacking even a class analysis of U.S. society, is incredibly weak in such theoretical work.

5) The organizational tasks facing the Russian movement, which included building an entirely clandestine organization, in a setting where Marxist circles kept being broken up by arrests, could be begun by starting with the *Iskra* organization's work of building channels for smuggling correspondence and literature.

We do agree with the W.C. that those communists outside of the existing parties need to collaborate in a network to take up our party-building tasks, but there is nothing in the current U.S. conditions that convinces us that an *Iskra* network, i.e., a replay of the particular experience of the Russian party, is what is required in present conditions.

Rather than offer an editorial board that can present one more competing analysis of national and international events with the speed and topicality of a newspaper, communists should be concentrating our theoretical efforts on more basic investigations of the economic, political, and social structures of this society and the world at large, and on struggling out our theoretical differences. As to the best vehicle for polemics over our differences, surely [a long] article like this one is better suited for a journal than for a newspaper. And, though it is evident that our badly-needed exchange of practical experiences can be presented from time to time in the pages of a newspaper, there is nothing that makes this form superior to a journal, or the circulation of reports based on a questionnaire that would help elicit all-sided analyses.

Comrades in practice do need sources of topical exposures, but with the disunity that presently exists among us, all we can do is try to select those materials that we think are helpful and fairly correct on this or that subject, from the many competing communist newspapers. Adopting one of those papers as our central organ, or creating a new one, is possible only if one happens to have a very high level of unity with the editors of that paper. We would much prefer to see comrades engaged in systematic investigation and struggle to *produce* that unity, than have the focus be on rapid treatment of different issues as events raise them topically.

Incidentally, as if in confirmation of their weaknesses in trying to be this movement's *Iskra* editors, the W.C. comrades informed us that publication of our article would be delayed while they prepared a reply, after attending to

more pressing matters. Five months after we submitted it, the article still had not been printed.

Guardian-Building or Party-Building?

The same remarks apply to the idea of *Guardian* clubs as a substitute for a party-building network. Though one can understand comrades who agree with the *Guardian's* politics wanting to be in some kind of organization, it is difficult to take this club system seriously as a party-building form. It is closed to those with major disagreements with the *Guardian's* political line, while professing *no* unity on party-building line. In its conception—of which there have been no announced changes—its activities were to consist of centrally-led study of Marxism-Leninism and of the *Guardian's* political line, any kind of local practice, and supporting the newspaper materially and by spreading its influence.

Let us assume, however, that these functions will be integrated into what the *Guardian* staff has elaborated of a party-building line. That line holds that party-building is the uniting of Marxist-Leninists through ideological struggle and the study of concrete conditions in the U.S. Then consider Irwin Silber's defense of "top-down" leadership of the ideological struggle and his failure to put forward any plan by which the *different* "tops" among the non-party forces can compete for ideological leadership. What emerges, then, is a plan to build a nationwide organization of active Marxist-Leninists by consolidating those individuals who already agree with the *Guardian's* politics. While this plan will strengthen the political position and the always-desperate material position of the *Guardian* (sustainers were to be given preference as club recruits!), it ignores the many circles and individuals who have anywhere from serious to extreme political differences with the *Guardian*. This is the height of sectarianism, from those who supposedly consider uniting Marxist-Leninists to be party-building.³⁶

SUMMARY

Separate local circles, without an organization linking them, are incapable of struggling over differences systematically, and they are tremendously handicapped in theoretical work and in exchanging the lessons of practical experience.

Yet it would be a mistake to link them up in a nationwide democratic-centralist organization before struggling to unity on a program, for it is that struggle which provides the best chance for developing a consistent Marxist-Leninist political line, which assures that line agreement is principled, not evolved through bureaucratic centralism and slavishness; and which justifies the rank and file's reliance on centrally-produced agitation and propaganda. Moreover, we should not adopt a division of labor that gives some

³⁶The *Guardian* club plan is explained in the 9/7/77 issue of the paper, pp. 12-13. The continuing failure to even *try* to integrate that plan into the needs of the party-building movement(s) as a whole is clear from the article on "The State of the Party-Building Movement," 10/18/78, pp. 11-14.

comrades substantial authority in guiding an organization before the leaders have actually shown their qualifications in practice. The opportunist leaders of the existing parties are proof that giving the *appearance* of being "more developed" is not enough. The third precondition for successful use of democratic centralism is a good understanding of democratic centralism itself, a precondition shown crucial by the bureaucratic-centralist abuses of the existing U.S. parties and the degeneration of many other communist parties in the world.

In fact, a dispersed, democratic-centralist organization is a party, though it may not be a true vanguard party. The existing parties "leaped" to this form of organization without meeting any of the preconditions for its use. They were motivated by the same "left" impatience which, for most, causes their disdain for theory and their sectarianism towards communists with whom they differ. At the same time, this "leftism" on organization reinforces their sectarianism, since it encourages members of each group to see *their* leaders, *their* press, *their* line as capable of meeting the needs of whatever honest communists there are in the movement. Moreover, adoption of the form of organization that was *designed* to permit communists to engage in the most widespread agitation and propaganda encourages their disinterest in our other tasks. When they pass from all this to including *Party* in the name of the organization, they take a relatively small step; the big one was adopting the democratic-centralist form as a "pre-party."

The form we need for a pre-party organization is a network linking the local circles and individuals. Through it we must organize theoretical study and struggle and the debate over political line, exchange agitational and propaganda literature, discuss the lessons of practice, and keep up with developments in the rest of the communist movement. The network's internal organization would depend on the forces involved; but the general principle is that the work would be centrally coordinated, while controversial questions would be settled through open struggle, rather than by designated authorities. The rank and file of every group should study the debates on major issues.

History disproves the view that only the democratic-centralist form permits the development of political line, though that form is superior once the preconditions for its use have been met. Nor is it true that a pre-party network is too organized because only joint practical experience can build unity.

Neither the "*Iskra* plan" nor the *Guardian* clubs can utilize the efforts of, and meet the needs of, all who can contribute to party-building. The OCIC *could* play that role, but only if it transforms itself into a body that bases its unity on a correct party-building line, not a particular line on the role of the two superpowers.

A properly organized party-building network will immeasurably speed our progress from the primitiveness of small circles to the advanced democratic-centralist form of organization, by vastly improving our ability to carry out essential theoretical and practical work.

V

Who Should Unite in a Party-Building Organization?

No party-building question has proved more vexing for U.S. communists than the problem of what forces should unite in party-building efforts. Most of the existing parties, or the organizations which preceded them, moved in and out of liaison committees, continuations committees, and "revolutionary wings" with groups they thought they could unite with. Among the remaining non-party forces, there are three loose groupings in the movement, primarily defined by their analyses of the international situation. Within each of them there is struggle over whether or not to limit current party-building efforts to forces within their own section of the movement.

The question of which forces should ally in a party-building effort cannot be answered simply by saying, "We must unite our own section of the movement." The history of the appearance of these groupings gives none of them a basis for confidence that all in that grouping are reliable party-building forces. Nor does the origin of these groups justify a conclusion by any of them that the work, experience, and different perspectives on *all* questions (there is, after all, more to study than the international situation) of *everyone* from another section would do more harm than good within a party-building network.

HOW TO DETERMINE THE UNITY REQUIRED

There should be a radical realignment of the non-party communists who are now grouped according to some aspects of international line. The starting point for identifying those Marxist Leninists who should unite to build a party is this: identify those who can agree on *how* to build a party. *Any* organization should include or exclude members only on the basis of unity on the group's main goals and its methods for achieving them, along with some evidence of the reliability of those who profess agreement with the organization's goals and methods.

As of this writing, both the forces in the Organizing Committee for an Ideological Center and the majority of a group of collectives who agree generally with the line on the international situation put forward by the Party of Labor of Albania and others¹ are making an error, in fact the same error. Each wants to engage in party-building with forces that lack substantial

¹I.e., opposition to the policies that flow from the Theory of Three Worlds, *along with* opposition to Soviet social-imperialism.

agreement on party-building line, having relied on international line as their basis of unity. Each grouping is bound to split, for even if it plays a useful role in organizing struggle over party-building line among its constituent circles, some forces will inevitably not be won over to the majority line.

We remind comrades that an analysis of the international situation is not the first crucial unresolved question to be held up as the touchstone of revolutionary Marxism. In fact, in choosing such a touchstone, the anti-“left” forces, too, are borrowing a technique from the old ultra-left party-building line. At different times in the last few years, the instant, easy “line of demarcation” has been the nature of Soviet social-imperialism, whom to support in Angola, parts of the Black national question, and whether political line is key. Those who saw their positions on these issues as magic means of distinguishing friends from enemies generally remained at each others’ throats anyway. Yet this fact has created few doubts about whether the overall analysis of the international situation—as important as it is—can function any better as an automatic means of unifying honest communists and isolating serious opportunists.

What is needed—instead of this spontaneous acceptance of existing divisions over international line—is a struggle over party-building line that includes all of the non-party communists in the country, leading eventually to formation of a party-building organization *by those who can agree on its goals and methods*.

In Appendix B we state our own proposal for what this unity should be. It includes both an attempt to summarize the universal principles of Marxism-Leninism, since those state communists’ long-range goals and basic methods, and what we consider the correct answers to the main questions about the tasks of communists in a pre-party organization. In general we think that questions of party program should be settled *within* the network. Studying such questions is, after all, one of its principal tasks.

However, in order to exclude comrades who for now, at least, are so thoroughly subjective, confused, or opportunist as to predictably hold back the work of the network more than they could contribute to it or benefit from it, we do add some points which should be clear to all who are willing to look at facts. (We are not saying that everyone who should be in the network accepts these positions now; but we think that with a moderate amount of struggle, they should be won over during the period of struggle to form the network.) These are, essentially, (1) that the USSR is under the rule of revisionists who exploit and oppress their own people and play a counter-revolutionary role on a wide scale internationally; (2) that there is no justification for a tactical or strategic alliance between the U.S. proletariat and bourgeoisie, and (3) that the current Chinese leadership is, or may be,² revisionist. To be left open are

²Failure to have studied this question enough to have a position is not a sign of serious opportunism or inability to grasp Marxism-Leninism. But such opportunism or weakness is clearly manifest in those who have taken the question up and still consider the Teng-Hua group Marxist-Leninist. Such people must know, and in general accept, that the C.P.C. leaders portray a strong U.S. and NATO as “forces for peace,” name the U.S. as a possible opponent of superpower hegemonism, and encourage alliances with the ruling classes of Third World countries who are *the tools* of the neocolonialism which

the questions whether the USSR is social-imperialist, playing a *consistently* counter-revolutionary role or whether it carries out some progressive actions, based on an economic system that is still essentially socialist; whether the Theory of Three Worlds *necessarily* leads to a social-chauvinist alliance with the U.S. bourgeoisie;³ and all other unsettled questions of political line.

Why Not "The Highest Level of Unity"?

Some comrades have said to us, "We need the highest level of unity possible, to weld the core that can later win over other honest forces." Or they have asked, "How can you struggle against the Theory of Three Worlds if you include those who accept it, even if only in its less blatant versions?" Similar points have been raised among the "anti-'lefts,'" and comparable positions are probably influential among the pro-Three-Worlds-Theory communists outside of the parties. Such comrades are absolutizing one aspect of a contradiction that they do not even recognize.

The side which they do recognize is those truths long overemphasized by the "left" sectarian line in our movement: the higher the level of unity in an organization, then the greater its discipline, the more its members can rely on the work of each other, the faster it can respond to events, the less there is to settle before it moves to a higher form of organization, and the less it must deal with internal struggle over every move and decision. And, *if its members are lucky enough to have been very consistent Marxist-Leninists to start with*, they minimize the presence of opportunism in their organization.

The less-recognized aspect of the contradiction is this: the lower the level of unity, then the larger will be an organization's forces; the better the control which the best elements will have over those who would be deviating if left to themselves; and the more the members can correct their own one-sidedness and particular forms of opportunism, through struggle with the views of others.

The contradiction cannot be avoided by simply asserting that the network will struggle with outsiders, too, so its members could learn from, and teach,

they are supposedly fighting, and that internally they actually restored capital to the former capitalists, accompanied Teng's U.S. visit with propaganda about the big strengths and minor weaknesses of the U.S. social system, restricted worker and peasant access to higher education, declared that in socialist China the intellectuals are not a different stratum from the proletariat, and have rapidly moved to place their economy in a position of dependence on the markets and good will of the Western imperialist bloc. (We will provide documentation for all of these statements upon request.)

³There are still some forces taking a position that the Theory of Three Worlds, correctly understood, identifies the role of the contradictions that do exist between oppressed nations and imperialism and between the lesser imperialists and the superpowers, but that forces like the CP(M-L), which draws counter-revolutionary implications from the theory, are distorting it (e.g., League for Proletarian Revolution, Workers Congress). This position is becoming less and less tenable. In fact, the R.C.P. gave it up late last year, finally opposing the Three Worlds Theory itself. However, we think that this viewpoint is neither so inherently implausible nor so well demolished in open debate that those who hold it can be presumed to be more consolidated opportunists than those with objectively anti-Marxist lines on other important questions, questions which everyone is willing to leave open for now.

other forces without being in the same organization with them. As a practical matter, the small group that can unite on a developed party-building line *and* the nature and role of the Soviet Union *and* whether the Theory of Three Worlds can be reconciled with internationalism will have its hands full doing whatever it is they thought they could accomplish with their highly unified core. They would do some polemicizing with other forces, of course, but without nearly the organization, intensity, and desire for and commitment to achieving unity that will be evident in struggles conducted within the network. First there are the obvious problems of priorities for the network's resources, which would have to be resolved by concentrating on internal struggles over differences. Moreover, the lack of democratic centralism means that the organization would have difficulty polemicizing with other forces. Either it would have to take a great deal of time to unite on the polemic, or individual circles would have to polemicize separately, to the extent that they could without neglecting their network tasks. (We suspect that the truth of this prediction could be confirmed by members of the OCIC, who, understandably, do not seem to have much time for struggling with other forces.)

The contradiction between the advantages of a smaller, more unified group, and those of a larger one, with more and broader human resources and a broader audience for representatives of consistent Marxism-Leninism, can be resolved neither by insisting on "the highest level of unity," nor by throwing the doors open to all who consider themselves Marxist-Leninists (a tendency towards which our collective deviated in an earlier draft of this book). An organization must be narrowed to those who can agree on what the real principles of Marxism-Leninism and who have genuine agreement on the organization's tasks and basic methods of taking them up. We should also limit our forces to those who can recognize the truly obvious realities in the world mentioned above (on the U.S., the USSR, and the possibility of Chinese revisionism), but we should not require acceptance of positions that one would normally hold only by having been positioned in the part of a divided movement which was exposed to the best polemics on the question. Comrades should not try to restrict efforts to "our trend" or "our tendency," as currently defined by international line, out of subjective sectarian impulses and fear of struggle. Doing so will diminish the organization's resources; greatly diminish its ability to arrive at an all-sided and correct line, through struggle with those who have different experiences and different strengths and weaknesses; and greatly diminish its ability to involve, in its positive motion, forces which would otherwise play their part in the class struggle with their own deviations uncorrected.

Ideally, "lines of demarcation"⁴ that resolve the problem should be based on a very concrete analysis of the different circles in the movement, not on abstract ideas about "what any honest communist ought to understand by now." But the disorganization and divisions within the movement make all but the sketchiest of such analyses very difficult to develop. As far as we know, no

⁴We add quotation marks where, like many others, we use the term imprecisely. Here we mean not lines that distinguish revolutionary communists from all other socialist trends and tendencies, but lines to identify communists who should at this point work together on party-building.

one within "our tendency" (that agreeing with the P.L.A. international line) has had substantial contact with those who identify themselves as anti-"left" or "anti-dogmatist" for several years, and vice versa. (Our own initial contact with a few such forces, however, has shown us not only some sharp and serious differences, but some startling areas of apparent unity, often on matters on which there is broad unity within "our tendency" as well.) Nor do we, at least, have much real knowledge about the general grasp of Marxism-Leninism and openness to struggle of those still seeking to reconcile the Theory of Three Worlds with genuine internationalism. Moreover, many circles have no public presence at all and are unknown except to comrades who have accidentally come into contact with them. Thus our own attempt at drawing "lines of demarcation" is based on a combination of sketchy knowledge, and some inferences about what can and cannot be presumed to have been demonstrated to the more objective forces in this movement, given the nature of the debates that have taken place, events that are well known in the world, and the relative newness of some of the communist forces.

The level of unity that we do propose for a party-building network will be quite significant and will, in fact, take real struggle to achieve. Many comrades minimize the extent to which unity on a party-building line would narrow our forces to a group capable of being more consistent, objective Marxist-Leninists. In Appendix B, a statement of party-building principles that we propose as a basis for unity, we also state in brackets what common erroneous positions would thereby be excluded from the organization. The unity is much narrower than the current unity on party-building of any existing section of the movement. Moreover, the whole purpose and concept of the network imply a willingness to struggle, on the part of its members, that is rare in the U.S. communist movement. Furthermore, a unified application of Marxism-Leninism to the basic problems of party-building would itself reflect a certain degree of ideological unity, although line disagreements will still be sharp.

Nevertheless, while a statement of Marxist-Leninist principles and the essentials of a party-building line permit at least formal agreement on the main goals and methods of a party-building organization, we do think that it is necessary to go somewhat farther in trying to insure some reliability and objectivity among the comrades who join, which is why we add the points listed in part I.B of the proposed basis of unity. Those points mean that all in the network would agree on the basic internationalist duties of the U.S. proletariat, including opposition to the CP(M-L) line, agree that the social order run by the Soviet revisionists is not the kind of revolutionary society we seek to build and that its role in the world is far from consistently internationalist, and agree that it is at least possible that the C.P.C. leadership is also revisionist.

Political Lines as Demarcators

"Lines of demarcation" abound in this movement. Many of us are positive that we will not be in the same party with those who do not think as we do today on the international situation, the nature of the Soviet social system, the Black national question, basic trade union tactics, etc. Certainly these are all crucial questions, and there will come a point in the debate over each and the accumulation of experience, where few besides diehard opportunists will cling

to an incorrect line on any such question. But we are nowhere near that point today. The poor quality of many of the polemics in this movement, the scattered nature of the topics covered by millions of words of such polemics, and the fact that few lines have yet been verified in practice here, all make it wrong for us to conclude that all those with an incorrect line are so opportunist that they should be excluded from the exchange of views and experiences and the struggle for unity.

Our standard for whether a position on a particular question of the application of Marxism-Leninism should be taken as a point to separate those who can contribute to party-building from those who, on balance, cannot, is based neither on how important the question is nor on how clear the answer is to us. The standard must be whether events in the world and ideological struggles in the communist movement can be said to have proven the correctness of the line in question to most communists who are open to struggle.

This standard has been met on very few questions in the United States. The communist movement has been so divided that in many cases comrades accepting incorrect lines have not even been exposed to good polemics for the correct line. The outpouring of so much polemical literature that no one could keep up with it, sectarian refusal to write *good* polemics (which take opposing arguments seriously enough to actually try to refute them), the frequent instances of one incorrect line being opposed mainly by another incorrect line, sectarian and slavish refusals to pay much attention to other groups' writings, and the general total anarchy in which ideological struggle is conducted in this movement have all guaranteed the maintenance of the disunity, confusion, and acceptance of opportunist lines that abound here—well beyond that which is unavoidable because of the particular opportunist tendencies of individual comrades. Take the class character of the USSR, or the Black national question, for example. We have trouble seeing how anyone who opposes Soviet revisionism and its ruling group's exploitation of the Russian people could doubt that the USSR is a bureaucrat-capitalist, imperialist country. Nor is it easy to understand how anyone could demand the "right" of about half the population in the old Black Belt area of the South to determine the destiny of all the inhabitants of the region. But we also know that many comrades have been left unexposed to persuasive arguments for the correct lines on these questions,⁵ while possessing at least a plausible rationale for their own views.

Needless to say, different lines on such questions cannot coexist in one party. We cannot have one wing of the party pointing to "the internationalist assistance provided by socialist Cuba," while another condemns purported attempts to export revolution that actually seek to establish a beachhead for Soviet neo-colonialism. Nor is this an issue on which the minority should subordinate itself to the majority; we cannot agitate for socialism without agreeing on what it is. The same goes for the Black national question. It is a matter of basic programmatic unity because no one should assist in promoting what they see as a social-chauvinist line.

But to say that the two lines cannot coexist in one party does not mean that

⁵And, to be honest, we have read little literature arguing that the USSR is something other than capitalist.

communists beginning an extended process of settling these and other questions, and of otherwise building the party, cannot work together to do so. Though those with opportunist views on the class nature and international role of the USSR thereby show a likelihood of inclining towards opportunism on other questions, this one cannot be a “line of demarcation” for participation in the network for two reasons. First, as we have said before, the polemic on the question has not been fully unfolded in a way that means that all those with an incorrect line on it have had a good opportunity to have the errors pointed out to them, and yet still cling to those errors. Second, and partly because of the half-developed state of the polemics, there is no 100% correlation between having a fairly good or very bad grasp of this issue, and being able or unable to apply Marxism-Leninism to other problems facing us. *Some* comrades with an incorrect line on the international situation, who may be won over sooner or later, may have a great deal to contribute to the solution of other questions. And certainly within the anti-Three-Worlds, anti-social-imperialist “camp” at least, there are forces which do agree on the international situation but which have such major differences on other questions that they regard each other as serious opportunists.

The movement will only be unified if a tendency forms which is willing to organize the struggle over the international situation, the national question, and other crucial issues. One sectarian alternative is that generally taken by those who believe, or believed, that “political line is the key link”: each organization, large or tiny, must develop its own partial program through internal study and summing up its own practice. We have nothing against comrades’ studying political line questions on their own when there is no more organized way to take them up, but the “political-line-is-key” view assumes that a group will then look for eventual unity with those with whom it can match up programs. The inevitable corollary is that the circle’s political line positions should be used as “lines of demarcation” to show who is too “dishonest” to even bother to draw into patient struggle in this pre-party period, despite the absence of the experience and organized and effective line struggle required to win most honest revolutionaries over to correct lines. (Alternatively, of course, such formations as the OCIC could follow the old path of unifying in a democratic-centralist form and relying on a designated “center” to decide unresolved programmatic questions, without “interference” from other forces, after using one or two political line questions and some shared general critiques of other groups as a basis of unity.)

A *party* needs its program—those who accept democratic centralism in the work of winning the proletariat to certain “aims and objects” and the means of attaining them must agree on those aims and objects and methods. But *our* “aims and objects,” in *this* period, should be to struggle over those programmatic questions and tactical lines; try *different* ones in practice—as we must while we disagree; learn from others’ experiences as well as from our own; and begin the scientific study of U.S. society in its imperialist decline. Without unity on a political program, we should certainly not form a fully disciplined, party-like organization, but we can form a party-building network.

*Before We Can Unite. . . We Must
First of All Stop Quoting Out of Context*

Incidentally, now is as good a time as any to point out the consistency with which communists have misused a quotation from Lenin about lines of demarcation, with a unanimity that runs from the old "Revolutionary Wing" to the "anti-dogmatist" Steering Committee of the OCIC. All who are ready to annoint their own section of the movement as the "genuine" Marxist-Leninists and justify walling themselves off from serious struggle with others reprint these words: "Before we can unite, and in order that we may unite, we must first of all draw firm and definite lines of demarcation."⁶

Well, here it is, right? V.I. Lenin says that it would be a mistake to unite in a joint party-building project without first demarcating the genuine from the sham Marxists.

Wrong.

In 1900, when the Economist deviation⁷ was influential among Russian communists, Lenin was saying that the communists could not yet unite *in a party*. First they had to struggle—together—to resolve their differences where possible, and to draw lines of demarcation between consistent Marxism and opportunism, so that they could form that party. Here is the entire passage:

. . . We Russian Social-Democrats must unite and direct all our efforts towards the formation of a strong party. . . . What plan of activity must we adopt to revive the Party on the firmest possible basis?

The reply usually made to this question is that it is necessary to elect anew a central Party body and instruct it to resume the publication of the Party organ. But in the period of confusion through which we are now passing, such a simple method is hardly expedient.

To establish and consolidate the party means to establish and consolidate unity among all Russian Social-Democrats, and, for the reasons indicated above ["an ideological wavering. . . an infatuation with the fashionable 'criticism of Marxism' and with 'Bernsteinism,' the spread of the views of the so-called 'economist' trend"]

⁶*Declaration of the Editorial Board of Iskra*, LCW 4: 354.

⁷Lenin described the typical form of this deviation as follows:

. . . Economism (in the broad sense of the word), the principal feature of which is its incomprehension, even *defense, of lagging*, . . . the lagging of the conscious leaders behind the spontaneous awakening of the masses. The characteristic features of this trend express themselves in the following: with respect to principles, in a vulgarisation of Marxism and in helplessness in the face of modern "criticism", that up-to-date species of opportunism; with respect to politics, in the striving to restrict political [as opposed to economic] agitation and political struggle or to reduce them to petty activities, in the failure to understand that unless Social-Democrats take the leadership of the general democratic movement in *their own* hands, they will never be able to overthrow the autocracy; with respect to tactics, in utter instability. . . ; and with respect to organization, in the failure to understand that the mass character of the movement does not diminish, but increases, our obligation to establish a strong and centralised organisation of revolutionaries capable of leading the preparatory struggle, every unexpected outbreak, and, finally, the decisive assault.

"A Talk With the Defenders of Economism," LCW 5: 317-18.

(p. 352)], such unity cannot be decreed, it cannot be brought about by a decision, say, of a meeting of representatives; it must be worked for. In the first place, it is necessary to work for solid ideological unity. . . and to this end it is, in our opinion, necessary to have an open and all-embracing discussion of the fundamental questions of principle and tactics raised by the present-day "economists," Bernsteinians, and "critics." Before we can unite, and in order that we may unite, we must first of all draw firm and definite lines of demarcation. Otherwise, our unity will be purely fictitious, it will conceal the prevailing confusion and hinder its radical elimination.

The *Declaration* went on to explain that the *Iskra* newspaper would contribute to this process by expressing its editors' points of view on all questions of principle and by providing space in its columns for others' polemics.

The Economist and Bernsteinian deviations were extremely serious turns away from revolutionary Marxism. They were certainly no more tolerable within a communist party than a view of the world that could lead to social-chauvinism, than a sentimental unwillingness to analyze a superpower's actions in light of the interests of a social-imperialist ruling class, or than serious ultra-leftism. But Lenin's plan was to conduct a line struggle *with* the exponents of anti-Marxist deviations among the Russian Marxists, in order to either win them over or defeat their considerable influence among communists and class-conscious workers. Conducting this struggle was what Lenin called *drawing* lines of demarcation. He did not say, "To hell with the Economists and those under their sway; let's demarcate them out of our efforts to build the party and set up forms where we consistent Marxists can talk to ourselves."

Naturally, with this approach, not everyone involved in the party-building struggles that culminated in the Second Congress left that Congress as a member of the Party, though *Iskra*'s defeat of Economism obviously increased the ranks of those who were won to the correct line. But there is an extremely important lesson in this. If party-building is a *process*, U.S. communists, too, can engage in it without guarantees that all who now join to struggle for unity will succeed, and it is fortunate that we can do so. There are no such guarantees, and the futile pursuit of them, through refusal to see in party-building itself a process of drawing lines of demarcation, would lead to one more unnecessarily narrow grouping of forces going its own way, guided not only by its members' common strengths, but by their unchallenged common weaknesses as well.

Separate polemics must be addressed to each section of the non-party communists, as to why those who agree with part of them on party-building line but still have some important differences on international questions are fit to work closely with in party-building. We will not attempt such polemics in the present book. Here we merely remind our "pro-P.L.A." friends that members of "the Trend" opposed the Theory of Three Worlds and its social-chauvinist implications long before we did, even if partly for the wrong reasons; that at least some of them are quite critical of the Soviet revisionists and their role in the world but are unable to grasp how capitalism could be restored without the legal forms of private ownership of the means of production; that to the extent that they were exposed to our polemics and *Peking Review* articles on social-imperialism—and many were not—our arguments were discredited by being connected to a Three Worlds Theory that even then justified a leaning

towards the U.S. imperialists; and that in these circumstances these comrades' regrettable reliance on the *Guardian* and the *Organizer* for "objective" reporting of world events is understandable and, for some, remediable.

Similarly, we point out to "Trend" comrades that it is not totally unreasonable that we and many other Marxist-Leninists—here and worldwide—believe that the revisionist bureaucrats and managers in the USSR, whose benefits and privileges are the fruits of the labor of the Russian working people, have discovered a new kind of capitalism, not a new kind of socialism; that it is quite possible that even the "progressive" actions of such a group internationally are aimed at serving their own material interests and often succeed in doing so; that beliefs of the communists who hold this view are based on published *facts*—or at least alleged facts—not, as the PWOC has claimed, on a dogmatic belief that the rise to power of revisionism *logically* proves the rise to power of the bourgeoisie; that we firmly oppose the Theory of Three Worlds and any suggestion of alliance or even a "soft line on" the U.S. or any other imperialists; and that we are as unexposed to any serious polemics supporting your views as you are to ours.

As for the inconsistent upholders of the Theory of Three Worlds, they should not be surprised that when the Communist Party of China and its affiliated party here believe that the Theory of Three Worlds calls for "a strong United States," identifies the U.S. as "a force for peace," and attacks the less enthusiastic bourgeois supporters of imperialist war preparations as "appeasers," that many of the rest of us also believe that your theory leads to these policies. But other comrades should not overlook the fact that the Three Worlds Theory has a certain vitality because of the prestige of Mao Tse-tung and because of the theory's ability to highlight oppressed nations' struggles and other real phenomena in the world (while twisting such phenomena to make the secondary aspect—like real contradictions between the West European and U.S. imperialists—into the primary aspect); the fact that at least some of these comrades do in general support internationalism and oppose social-chauvinism; and the fact that little attention has been paid to exposing this "centrist" line.

The point we are making is not, of course, that all these points of view are correct, or even that the erroneous ones are relatively harmless and should remain free from attack. We do hold that, under the conditions and methods by which our movement has divided over these issues, it is possible to hold a deviant line today without being constitutionally wedded to serious opportunism. This is why the deviations *should* be attacked, not left free to do their damage. And the best way to attack them now is struggle within an organization, one of the purposes of which is to conduct such struggle.

Defeating Opportunism by Temporarily Tolerating Differences

Therefore, to comrades who ask, "How can we struggle against the Theory of Three Worlds if we unite with people who think it can be reconciled with internationalism?" or "How can we struggle against the ultra-left line if we unite with people who have not completely broken with it?", our reply is this: "Better." You can struggle better because the anti-Theory-of-Three-Worlds forces or the anti-"lefts" do not need to close themselves up in separate

organizations, any more than the consistent Marxists in Russia needed to make *Iskra* a paper that Economists and their followers could not contribute to and, therefore, would not read. The struggle against an erroneous line is precisely the struggle to win other comrades away from that line, while taking the correct line to the workers. Such struggles can be carried out *within* a single party-building network, where the polemics will be serious and organized and the goal will be unity. Some in the network will not be won over to the correct line on all questions, but as the contradictions are sharpened and die-hards move to a more consolidated opportunist stance, there will be time enough then for a split. In the meantime, however, more comrades will be won over to the correct line than if we limit the struggles to a pre-network or outside-of-the-network setting.

There is more than a kernel of truth to many comrades' idea about rallying the few best forces among U.S. communists. But, to an important extent, the proposed network itself does this. And beyond that, the best forces *among* those in the network can collaborate to play an objectively leading role, just as the editors of *Iskra* collaborated among themselves when they used that paper for a *common* effort among Economists and consistent Marxists to struggle out differences. Remember, this is not a party that we are talking about, where separate lines of communication between different circles are the first step to factionalism. It is a transitional form *to* the party, *from* the anarchy of separate circles. And if we and some other comrades form a loose bloc to coordinate our attempts to prove the restoration of capitalism in the USSR, or the PWOC and others form such a bloc to struggle for the deformed workers' state analysis of that country, or the P.U.L. and others collaborate in trying to prove their critique of "left" sectarianism in the movement, such collaboration, conducted in a principled manner, can only help organize the debates and raise their level. But no one needs their own party-building organization just to struggle for such views.

We return to this issue below, as we examine the question of how leadership or an ideological center will develop, but first we must examine certain concepts about opportunism and lines of demarcation.

LINES OF DEMARCATION OR OPPORTUNISM-DETECTION DEVICES?

Our differences on whom to unite with boil down to this: the predominant line says, "First we look for the genuine forces to unite with, then we worry about what to do"; we say, "First struggle over what is to be done, then unite those willing and able to do it." The first line rests on a mistaken conception of opportunism and how to fight it.

A large number of comrades who do not agree that people with major political line differences can join in a common party-building effort do not fully understand what real lines of demarcation are. Somewhere they have gotten the impression that opportunism is a very static and "either-or" sort of a thing. Either you have it, and you cannot be worked with, or you are 98% free of it and should be united with. And to find out, all we need are certain test questions—lines of demarcation—to see whether you are infected or immune. The MLOC, even in the days when it admitted the magnitude of our theoretical

tasks and the degree of confusion in our movement on political line, was sure that you could demarcate communists from revisionists on the basis of whether they demanded a right of secession for Black people in the Black Belt South. For the original "revolutionary wing," it was some aspects of party-building line. For many today, it is the international situation.

The view of opportunism that this concept of lines of demarcation corresponds to has been exemplified in many other ways as well. The A.T.M. used to write of building a party "free from opportunism." The W.V.O. thought we could "innoculate" ourselves against revisionism with "anti-revisionist premises." MLOC representatives told us that their soon-to-be-published line on the Chicano National Question would draw another line of demarcation. Though they had no idea how widely it would be studied, how adequate their propaganda would turn out to be in explaining and defending it, how firm a grip on the movement bourgeois ideology has on the subject, or whether they could be shown weaknesses in their own line in the course of struggle, they obviously felt true Marxist-Leninists would go for it, opportunists would reject it, and that would be that.

Finally, last year we struggled with other comrades about who should be united in a Marxist-Leninist coalition to deepen study of the international situation and oppose the CP(M-L) line. The question of inviting the participation of the MLOC and the Central Organization of U.S. Marxist-Leninists arose. We all agreed that these organizations are pursuing seriously opportunist lines in important areas of their work. But our own view was that they could each contribute to the struggle for an internationalist line within the movement and should therefore be invited to participate. They could always be expelled later for any seriously disruptive practice, if necessary. The other comrades saw the work as a crucial way of unifying the honest communists in this movement. Most of them believed, at one and the same time, that the struggle over the Theory of Three Worlds would create the honest, party-building trend in the movement and also that the MLOC, the COUSML, and other strictly opportunist forces were also encamped on the proletarian internationalist side of this line of demarcation. Hoping for deeper unity, they were totally uncomprehending of the notion that organizations characterized by serious opportunism should be invited to join in the work. What we could not (and cannot) understand is how joint work of those united on an analysis of the international situation would automatically group the true party-building forces, if it was already known that some with that analysis had to be excluded.

The Metaphysical View of Opportunism

This whole conception of opportunism and lines of demarcation is wrong on four counts. First, according to this metaphysical view, no quantitative distinctions are recognized—either you are an opportunist or not. Second, despite what people may say about things changing and developing, their belief that we must "demarcate" all opportunists out of whatever we are doing—party-building, opposing the Theory of Three Worlds, etc.—reflects an assumption that no one changes, that no one can be won away from their opportunist errors. Third, and following from the first two, is the hope of

freeing ourselves and our organizations from opportunism by keeping out opportunists, as if the two-line struggle will not be with us as long as we have class society. Finally, no distinction is made between an organization's leaders, who are likely to be most consolidated in the line they are actively developing and struggling for, and its members, who will sometimes be more open.

Those who recognize no quantitative distinctions, who see lines of demarcation as tests for separating Marxist-Leninists from opportunists—period—must surely wonder why Lenin made judgments such as these:

[Participants in the RSDLP's Second Congress broke down into] four groups: 1) consistent revolutionary Social-Democrats; 2) minor opportunists; 3) middling opportunists; and 4) major opportunists (major by our Russian standards).⁸

In Russia—as usual—people have been found who have made it their business to enlarge on a little opportunist error and develop it into a system of opportunist policy.⁹

Rosa Luxemburg cannot, of course, be classed with the Liebmans, Yurkeviches and Semkovskys [previously described as “nationalist philistines, who are engaged in splitting the ranks of the proletariat”], but the fact that it was this kind of people who seized upon her error shows with particular clarity the opportunism she has lapsed into.¹⁰

Rosa Luxemburg was mistaken on the question of the independence of Poland; she was mistaken in 1903 in her appraisal of Menshevism; she was mistaken on the theory of the accumulation of capital; she was mistaken in July, 1914, when together with Plekhanov, Vandervelde, Kautsky and others, she advocated unity between the Bolsheviks and the Mensheviks; she was mistaken in what she wrote in prison in 1918 (she corrected most of these mistakes at the end of 1918 and the beginning of 1919 after she was released). But in spite of her mistakes she was—and remains for us—an eagle. And not only will Communists all over the world cherish her memory, but her biography and her *complete* works. . . will serve as useful manuals for training many generations of Communists all over the world.¹¹

. . . the notorious Akimov, . . . an extreme opportunist. . .¹²

. . . [L]et us quote. . . Otto Bauer, who also has his own “pet little point”—“cultural and national autonomy” [against which Lenin and Stalin struggled furiously]—but who argues quite correctly on a large number of most important questions.¹³

Opportunism is any form of putting one's own short-term interests, or those of a small group, above the long-term interests of the international proletariat. The adherents of an incorrect line on a political question generally deviate not only away from what the proletariat requires, but towards some narrow,

⁸*One Step Forward, Two Steps Back*, LCW 7: 334.

⁹“The National Programme of the RSDLP,” LCW 19: 541.

¹⁰“The Right of Nations to Self-Determination,” LCW 20: 459.

¹¹“Notes of a Publicist,” LCW 33: 210.

¹²“The Bourgeois Intelligentsia's Methods of Struggle Against the Workers,” LCW 20: 458.

¹³“The Discussion on Self-Determination Summed Up,” LCW 22: 324.

short-term interest or need of their own. If they are willing to look at a problem objectively and evaluate it from a proletarian class stand, rather than being swayed by their wishes, fears, or selfish interests, they can be shown their errors fairly readily. Others, those with more significant opportunism to be struggled against, are less willing to see and correct their mistakes; and they make them over a broader range of issues. Then there can be increasingly greater degrees of resistance to change, consistency in opportunist views, resort to equivocal statements and dishonest methods of argument, and use of factional means of struggle, culminating in the "extreme opportunist." Consistent opportunists serve the bourgeoisie, not the proletariat, whether they want to or not.¹⁴ Obviously, quantitative increases in opportunism reach qualitative significance, and at some point forces become those who would hold back the work more than help it, even considering the possibility of winning them over in the long run or the tactical benefits of continuing work with them long enough to better expose them before others. But this fact is a far cry from saying that opportunism on this or that question—even granting the ultimate importance of the question—makes people the kind of thorough-going opportunists who should be "demarcated" from our party-building efforts on the basis of their opportunism per se.

Second, comrades do change their views and recognize their mistakes. This is why Lenin and others wrote so many polemics aimed at winning at least rank and file communists away from opportunist lines, and why Mao called for criticism aimed at "curing the disease to save the patient." The histories of the Russian, Chinese, and Albanian parties all provide examples of the defeat of serious opportunist lines. This is why internal struggle is a constant feature of the life of every vital party, and why even very important disputes are generally settled by the minority submitting to the majority and lower bodies to higher bodies. For if the metaphysical view of opportunism were adopted (i.e., that if opportunism is there at all, it is primary and permanent), then differences would be constantly solved by expulsions, purges, and splits, not by trying to maintain the united action and united testing of a line by both those who uphold the correct line and "the opportunists." For why not just get rid of "the opportunists" once they are exposed? Yet the leadership of the three parties named above all worked hard to keep quite serious struggles

¹⁴And many do not. For example, Lenin referred to sincere and conscientious members of opportunist trends in "The Basic Thesis Against the Socialist-Revolutionaries," LCW 6: 271-75, and "Adventurism," LCW 20: 357. And in *What is to be Done?*, LCW 5: 418, he wrote,

Political activity has its logic quite apart from the consciousness of those who, with the best intentions, call either for terror or for lending the economic struggle itself a political character. The road to hell is paved with good intentions, and, in this case, good intentions cannot save one from being spontaneously drawn "along the line of least resistance", along the line of the *purely bourgeois Credo* programme.

This point has tactical implications for the struggle against others' opportunism. It is equally important, however, that comrades who are confident that they themselves are always free of any opportunism to recognize that honest intentions alone prove no such thing.

within their parties, before resorting to expulsions or splits.

The third part of the metaphysical picture of opportunism, that we can keep opportunism out of our parties and organizations if only we do enough “demarcating,” is equally wrong. Lenin and Mao explained why in bourgeois society—and in new socialist societies—both the ideological and the material pressure of the bourgeoisie on the people and the party is enough to cause constant intra-party struggle between proletarian and bourgeois or petty-bourgeois outlooks. We are *all* subject to opportunist influence; it is as wrong to look at ourselves metaphysically as flawless, consistent Marxist-Leninists as it is to look at all those with whom we differ as fatally flawed, consistent opportunists. Comrades should know from their own experience—in a movement already fragmented into organizations tiny enough to have a high level of internal unity—that splitting away from the most broadly-conceived categories of opportunism still does not free communist groups from internal struggle between at least one objectively opportunist line and (we hope) the proletarian line on each important question.

Finally, there is the leadership-membership distinction, which we discussed at length in our pamphlet *Learning From Past Mistakes*. . . . That distinction should not be absolutized, for those who receive their training in a given organization are often unreceptive to others’ criticisms of its line, and they have often internalized its whole ideological approach. On the other hand, the distinction should not be overlooked. Comrades who cannot think of working with, say, the authors of the *Guardian* positions on party-building, or the PWOC’s articles, or the Workers Congress’s positions, must remember that the price of avoiding those whom they consider serious opportunists is denial of access to whatever misled members can be won over. And some could be won over, with good ideological struggle, while events that verify some correct lines unfold in practice and in the world at large. (This is why we lay such heavy stress on the organizational principle of the network that requires *all* comrades in participating groups to read and discuss documents promoting the different positions on major controversies within the network. To defeat opportunism it is necessary to reach more than the leading promoters of the opportunist lines.)

The point of this discussion of opportunism is not to minimize its danger. Serious opportunists in the revolutionary camp have long functioned as “better defenders of the bourgeoisie than the bourgeoisie itself.” We know that Engels complained of having spent most of his life in struggles with other socialists, that a high proportion of Lenin’s works were polemics against opportunist lines, and that right and “left” opportunist leaders led the Chinese party and people into a series of disasters. For that matter, probably 80% of the present book is directed against the views of other communists, views that we consider objectively opportunist and damaging to the proletarian movement.

But the fact remains that the discovery of opportunism in other comrades does not even begin to settle the question of whether and how to work with them. Therefore disagreement with one or another (or even several) important programmatic points does not settle the question either. In a *party* where communists must agree on the proletariat’s goals, on agitation and propaganda concerning those goals, and on the most basic issues of with

whom, and on what terms, the working class should unite to seek them, obviously such points *must* be lines of demarcation. In a movement—or a part of a movement—that has been unable to come to grips with a way of solving those and other questions—they *must not* be lines of demarcation.

WHEN CAN WE AGREE ON THE MAIN DANGER?

Many comrades who agree with this would still question formation of a party-building organization without limiting it to those who agree on either “left” or right opportunism as the main current danger to our movement. We think that this is an extremely important question and should be taken up as soon as possible, but our own experience as victims of the confusion that has been sown in this movement on what are “left” and right errors convinces us that in large measure it is a question which should be taken up *within* the network, rather than used to narrow it in the beginning to those with a certain view.

The question of what lines on party-building itself are right opportunist and “left” sectarian should definitely be taken up in the context of the struggle over party-building line, a struggle that must precede formation of the network. For as we struggle for the correct line, we should struggle to understand the nature of the deviations. Inability to achieve general unity on the nature of the deviations would reflect lack of firm unity on a correct party-building line as well.¹⁵ But the conditions that permit taking up this question are absent for demanding clarity on whether the main *political line* deviations (e.g., on the national question, the international situation, the development of fascism) and erroneous methods of mass work are “left” or right. As valuable as such clarity would be, the demand for it is simply a disguised form of the premise that “political line is key” and that communists should either merge or avoid each other, depending on their programmatic and tactical views as they exist today. *For how can one’s overall view of the extent of “left” and right deviations exist apart from views on the correct line on every question considered?* What we need is an organization for members committed to study and struggle over political line questions in an organized way—which includes struggling over what is “left,” correct, and rightist—not yet another narrower, tighter organization composed of people who are already sure that they have all the answers and cannot do much with those who have different answers.

This is proven by a deep contradiction in the very form of the P.U.L. book. On the one hand, the comrades argue forcefully that “political line is not key” and in fact even see a party forming with room for an amazing degree of internal disagreement on political line. Yet on the other hand, they call for the building of an anti-“left”-sectarian trend. And how do they seek to prove that “left” sectarianism is the main danger in the movement? In part by showing

¹⁵We put this forward tentatively, since such lack of unity *might* reflect confusion on the nature of ultra-leftism, i.e., on how to describe errors that we all agree are errors. The question, concretely, is whether the struggle to show that, e.g., belittling theory and a certain kind of infatuation with militant struggle for its own sake *can* come from the “left,” should take place prior to formation of a party-building organization or within it. We lean towards the former solution.

the prevalence of a voluntarist, "left," party-building line, and in part by pages and pages of trying to show "left" sectarianism in political and tactical lines of different communist organizations. We were unable to study their book without getting deep into the national question, the woman question, the united front, etc.—matters which they and we supposedly agree should be taking a back seat until the struggle over party-building line permits the movement (P.U.L.'s view), or a section of it (our view), to take up the questions together in an organized way!

Moreover, as a practical matter, we know of some circles which we think tend towards "left" deviations and others which make right ones—and which, respectively, consider right and "left" opportunism to be the main danger—which nonetheless express very similar views on the need for theory, the need for genuine forms of practice, and the need to centralize the ideological struggle and share experience. And some, at least, have shown the kind of openness to struggle and self-critical attitude towards their own work that signify that struggle for unity could be worthwhile. Such forces should not be split on the basis of present inability to agree on the main danger.

One reason our party-building line permits leaving the overall relative prevalence of rightism and ultra-leftism unresolved is that it does not *define* party-building as destruction of this or that form of opportunism. Too many comrades have defined party-building as "making a break with" revisionism or with ultra-leftism, without explicitly elaborating a positive plan for the work of party-building. This is backwards; one cannot find the way forward just by firmly resolving to avoid the obstacles that have diverted others from the correct path. One must first find the correct path, though seeing the route others have travelled does help in discovering that path. Then the deviations which others have made from it can be assessed, and further analysis of those deviations can help prevent repetition of the same mistakes.

This is why it *should* be understood that it is ultra-left to try to be a ready-made vanguard of the working class, to expect to take truly effective "action" in mass work without being patient enough to develop theory dealing with our concrete conditions, to limit treatment of members of competing groups to "exposing" them before one's own members and the workers, and to organize as a party long before the preconditions for democratic centralism have been met. And it is, after all, deviations on party-building line that have done the most damage to our movement, including making it difficult to rectify opportunism on political line.

The fact remains, however, that opposition to "leftism" or rightism as the main danger overall—in party-building line and political line and style of work—is not a plan for party-building, nor is it a necessary part of such a plan. Therefore questions of the relative prevalence of "left" and right opportunism in *political* line can be reserved for struggle within a network that does have a party-building plan.

Our belief that the relative incidence of "left" and right political and tactical lines can be assessed as comrades try to develop correct lines is reinforced by a peculiarity of the U.S. communist movement's current situation: neither deviation is insignificant today. Therefore comrades do need to understand and recognize both forms that opportunism takes. (The Russian communists, too, often had to wage "the fight on two fronts—against the Right deviation

and against the 'Left' deviation."¹⁶) We doubt that dealing with one or another group's possible preoccupation with what is in fact the secondary danger would be a serious waste of the network's time, since the secondary danger, too, must be understood. Moreover, it would be better to risk spending extra time on such questions than to risk grouping only those forces who are so clear on what they consider the primary danger that they neglect what is secondary but real.

One can take this too far, of course. We are not trying to make a virtue out of ignorance or justify our own lack of a position. Many forces within the network will, of course, have definite views as to what is the main danger in the movement, and some will take initiative in seeking to combat that danger within the network itself. But the point is that this is one of those questions over which all those who have enough ideological unity to similarly assess our tasks should struggle together, not one that need narrow the circle of those who will seek to organize the line struggle, exchange of practical experiences, and so on.

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Why, then, if so many questions are to be left for struggle within the network, do we suggest previous unity on revisionism and oppression in significant foreign and domestic policies of the USSR, opposition to the Chinese and CP(M-L) type of alliance with the U.S. bourgeoisie, and openness to the possibility of the rise of revisionism in China? Because we think that these positions meet the standard for lines of demarcation set forth above. It does not take a lot of polemical struggle for comrades with even a moderately good grasp of Marxism-Leninism and moderate objectivity to accept these positions. Events in the world have demonstrated their correctness to anyone conceivably reliable enough in their politics to contribute to the work of a party-building organization. Furthermore, as a practical matter, explicit unity on these points would make it much easier for comrades who agree on party-building line to trust each other enough to break out of their own international-line-determined sector of the movement, to work with others. For now many "pro-P.L.A." people would be surprised to learn that many "*Guardian*-types" include opposition to Soviet revisionism in their own points of unity, while many anti-"lefts" do not know that there is firm and consistent opposition to the CP(M-L) international line among forces who do believe that there is another imperialist superpower in the world, besides the one which it is our duty to destroy. Finally, many in both camps forget that there are "Three-Worlders" who oppose any worldwide united front with the U.S. bourgeoisie. For such forces to work together, explicit reminders that there are limits to our disunity would be important.

LEADERSHIP, "IDEOLOGICAL CENTERS," AND UNITY

Hearing both our opposition to premature use of democratic centralism and our call for a network that does not really try to use political line questions to weed out opportunists in advance, some comrades think that we believe that all views will be equally correct, that all comrades will be able to make an equal

¹⁶*Industrialization of the Country and the Right Deviation in the CPSU(B)*, SW 11: 289.

contribution. We believe no such thing.

How Leadership Will Develop

Once a party-building network develops and begins its work, all previous communist history tells us that there will be serious line struggle within it. Definite groupings will probably evolve, as they often do even in parties. Leadership will develop within the network as well.

Many comrades—in totally different sections of today's movement—now raise the question of creating an ideological center. (We refer to the groups forming the OCIC, and to the Wichita Communist Cell and the Kansas City Revolutionary Workers Collective, two "pro-P.L.A." groups.) We think that those who speak of creating such a center pose the question incorrectly.

As those with unity on party-building organize to take up our tasks, the law of uneven development means that here and there some comrades and some local groupings will emerge to play a more active role, develop a correct line more consistently, and win people over to that line more articulately and energetically. (Such "leadership" will also develop among those who more consistently take opportunist positions. The task of the better forces will be to defeat their influence, which is possible if their followers are in the same party-building network, rather than under the sole sway of the opportunists.) Just as, in the heat of class struggle, some unusually committed and talented workers develop their skills as leaders, so our leaders will emerge as our tendency in the movement takes up its tasks.

There are things we can do to encourage this process. We should urge all comrades to direct their attention to the problems facing the movement as a whole. We can give members of our own groups who show leadership potential work assignments that will help them to develop further, as well as firm criticism to help them overcome their weaknesses. In addition, we should pay enough attention, in an open-minded manner, to the work produced by other circles so that we can recognize good leadership as it develops. Among the various people with some of the qualities of good leaders, we can only identify those who are politically reliable by observing their work, carefully considering the points raised by their opponents, and watching for *results* that show that they can solve the problems facing communists.

In this manner, we can and should create the best conditions for the development of leadership in a party-building organization. Contributions will *not* be equal, and whatever unity develops will arise only as the result of struggle to defeat the influence of incorrect views. (This is why, in Chapter II, we stated that the members of task forces assigned to theoretical work should represent different viewpoints that emerge in the network, and that much of their work should be carried out in full view of the entire organization.) Perhaps leaders of the struggle for the correct line will emerge who are so consistent and effective that they function as much as a center as Lenin's *Iskra* group did in Russia, perhaps not.

For now, more able comrades can try to provide leadership, and we can all work to create the conditions in which leaders will develop. Beyond this, however, we think that the current groping for ways to *create* a center is voluntarist, an attempt to wish our own Lenins into being. At best, trying to

concoct plans for developing a reliable center is a distraction from the work out of which leaders will really develop. At worst, real attempts at a shortcut to such development would just reincarnate, in some form, the premature adoption of centralized leadership implemented by today's parties.

Neither the OCIC forces nor the Kansas comrades have stated publically what they have in mind, but a few things we have heard or read make us think that both are contemplating organizational measures which invest major leadership powers in yet another central committee chosen on the basis of *apparently* showing some leadership ability beforehand. Certainly some OCIC members envision creating a leading circle for the larger group of "anti-'left'" forces. (See, e.g., Clay Newlin's references to "the building of a single genuine ideological center for the emerging Marxist-Leninist trend."¹⁷)

Other comrades, who are unconnected to the "ideological center" proposals but who see a network without a designated center as anarchistic, have even reminded us of Lenin's statements about the party developing from the top down, speaking of the *Iskra* group's role in unifying the Russian communists.¹⁸ What they forget is that no one *elected* that group as a center and gave it authority in advance to decide questions for the movement. Its role as a center came from its ability to *convince* members of other circles of the correctness of its line, on each question, in open ideological struggle. It is likely that such leadership will eventually be asserted within a U.S. party-building organization, too. But the last thing this movement needs is one more Marxist-Leninist "pre-party" that has skipped to the party form and thinks that it is Leninist democratic centralism to choose leaders to elaborate programmatic line.

A Whole Organization as a "Center"?

On the other hand, there seems to be a contrary tendency among both proponents of an ideological center (the OCIC, and the Kansas circles), to think not only that a group of circles can create an ideological center, but to see the organization of circles as the center itself. This may not be the real plan of anyone, but all the vagueness on what an ideological center would be permits this broader conception to creep into discussions of "lines of demarcation." There it justifies the "left" sectarian line on who should unite. For if, say, the entire OCIC or the entire group of collectives that oppose both the Three Worlds line and Soviet social-imperialism is to be transformed into an ideological center, then in come all the arguments of "We need the highest level of unity possible," "We need those with the most consistent grasp of Marxism-Leninism," "How can we fight the XYZ line if we let those who conciliate with it into the Center?," etc. But we have answered all these points already, and comrades should guard against any confusion of the issue by suggestions that an entire nationwide organization can itself be a leading circle.

A leading circle will inevitably develop *within* a larger pre-party network, and it *will* require "the highest level of unity." At the same time, the entire

¹⁷*Organizer*, 1/79, p. 18.

¹⁸E.g., *One Step Forward, Two Steps Back*, LCW 7: 394.

pre-party organization, if it carries out its work effectively, will eventually play a leading role in the entire communist movement and increasingly draw comrades away from the organizations that combine Marxism-Leninism with serious opportunism. But confusing that function with those to be fulfilled by a leading circle only serves to perpetuate the ultra-left demand for a narrow basis of unity for an entire pre-party organization.

If we are less fearful than others of letting those who appear to be opportunists join a pre-party organization, it is in part because we have no illusions about the entire organization being capable of functioning as an ideological center. It is also because we know that joining the party-building network will not be a ticket to party membership. (See p. 116, above.) There will be splits—that is unavoidable. But we are split up already. The question is whether we remain split, according to our present international-situation groupings, *before* struggling to overcome differences, or whether we later break with a smaller number of proven incorrigible opportunists. For, if history is any guide, the organization we call for can eventually develop ideological and programmatic unity among many of the forces who at present have widely divergent views on the questions the network will have to take up, if it applies the science of Marxism-Leninism, the practical experience of its members and of the proletariat internationally, and principled and systematic methods of struggle.

The P.C. demand for a broad enough network to permit such struggle to take place does not, therefore, come from any misconceptions about all comrades' views having equal validity. What we do favor is an equal right to be heard, and to be won over, on the part of all who unite on basic principles of Marxism-Leninism *and* the correct solutions to the problems of party-building *and* some easily-seen basics of the international situation. It is *that* equality that will encourage the development of the most all-sided and correct line and unite the greatest number of comrades on it, not the attempt to find shortcuts to unity through pre-existing "lines of demarcation" which identify sections of the movement that exist largely for historical reasons.

SUMMARY

The question of whom to unite with in party-building should not be answered by automatically accepting the existing divisions among the non-party communist circles and individuals. Nor should those divisions be justified by the one-sided argument that we need the highest level of unity possible, or that we can and must build a center "free of opportunism." What organizations need agreement on is their aims and methods.

In other words, what is essential is unity on basic principles of Marxism-Leninism and a well-developed line on how a consistently Marxist-Leninist party can be built (and the nature of the major deviations on *this* question). Beyond this, a very few positions are so clear from well-known facts, to those with the most basic grasp of Marxism-Leninism, regardless of what their practical experience has been and what part of the communist press they read, that these positions can be used to screen out communists or would-be communists who are unquestionably too subjective, confused, or opportunist to contribute to a network's work. We think that those positions

are that the U.S. proletariat should support liberation movements against the U.S. imperialists and should itself struggle to overthrow those imperialists, not support strengthening their military power; that the revisionists in the USSR have created an oppressive and exploitative society internally, and they frequently act in a great-nation chauvinist and counter-revolutionary way internationally; and that it is at least possible that the present leadership of the Communist Party of China is also revisionist.

Unity on answers to the main questions of party-building will be difficult to achieve. It will be a truly significant level of unity, and it will reflect the development of some degree of ideological unity as well. But the disunity within the network we propose will still be very great. The problems caused by such disunity would be outweighed by the organized interchange among more varied points of view. Such an interchange will permit correcting the weaknesses of the best forces, while placing those forces where they can best defeat the influence of opportunist lines among many or most members of the organization.

Many comrades, in each section of the movement, assume that the way forward is to group forces with the highest level of unity, so that they can build the party, unhindered by opportunism. Various political questions have been used to group forces this way in the past; now it is that of the character and relative roles of the two superpowers. Justification for sticking to the existing groupings, which did not coalesce according to any conscious process, is based on these erroneous propositions: (1) that the acceptance of an opportunist line on a litmus-paper-test "line of demarcation" proves that the comrades who fail the test are extreme and all-round opportunists, incapable of change; (2) that such comrades are incapable of making contributions on other questions; (3) that whether a person is an active developer or an unsophisticated and passive follower of an opportunist line, the degree of the person's opportunism and consolidation is the same; (4) that *passing* one or two of these litmus-paper tests proves a group's lack of opportunism (i.e., that it is "among the genuine forces"); (5) that, consequently, unity on party-building is fully achievable within each international-situation-determined section of non-party communists; (6) that an organization can be "free from opportunism"; (7) that comrades can try to build such a group without taking huge risks of "freeing themselves" from those who could correct their own errors, and whose deviations they could help correct; (8) that joining a pre-party effort amounts to a commitment to join with *all* the same forces in a party; and (9) that an ideological center can be chosen in advance, or can be a whole organization of many circles, if only it stays pure enough, when in fact it is only out of the struggle among disunited but reasonably honest comrades that genuine leadership will emerge.

These misconceptions buttress a subjective conclusion that what is now, in reality, the most controversial question among communists (the international situation) has been well settled. That conclusion permits those who are comfortably grouped today to develop their own party-building formations, formations that guarantee that the various forms of one-sidedness that affect each part of the movement will

remain free from *effective* criticism;¹⁹ guarantee that the best forces will have little influence on many good and average forces; guarantee that our resources will be much more meager than they need to be; and guarantee that—despite workers' demands for communist unity when we are in common practice—comrades will put a low priority on struggling out differences, because their energy for struggle is devoted to the controversies within their separate party-building organizations.

The line of seeking a shortcut to uniting "the genuine forces" via groupings on the current main controversy in the movement has been tested in practice several times. It has failed every time. Trying it again will only prolong and complicate the struggle to build a true vanguard party.

¹⁹We are convinced, for example, that some anti-"lefts" can teach the "pro-P.L.A." groups something about the struggle for democratic rights, that the latter can help the former correct some dangerous imprecision in the "class-struggle unionism" line, that valuable lessons about practical work can be passed among all the forces, etc.

VI

The Struggle for a Party-Building Organization: A Practical Proposal

Non-party communists' disunity over party-building line is tremendous. Even in the unlikely event that our own positions on the tasks, composition, and general form of a party-building network were totally correct, there would not be instant agreement with them. For comrades not in a party-building effort which they are sure is on the right track and unites all who should be participating, *the immediate task is to organize the struggle over party-building line.*

Joint party-building efforts cannot begin without unity on that line; unity on that line will never develop from articles in a half-dozen newspapers, erratic correspondence and privately-circulating papers, conferences held only by this or that section of the movement, and a host of pamphlets that largely reach other comrades only to the extent that all utilize and read *Guardian* advertisements. Even if everyone saw all this literature, the struggle would remain disorganized ideologically, as the P.U.L. has pointed out. Outside of a grouping like the OCIC, at least, there is little to encourage statements and polemics to respond directly to each other, and little to permit an undeveloped circle that is not prepared to publish its own pamphlet to just raise a question that should be taken up.

In our opinion, comrades from different sections of the movement who agree on the need for a struggle over party-building line among *all* of us should establish a theoretical journal devoted entirely to that struggle. It would be open to any serious contributors, but it would print materials only on questions such as the preconditions for party-formation, the theoretical and practical tasks of communists in the period before those preconditions are met, how we should organize ourselves, who should unite in a joint party-building effort, the role of an ideological center, and what have been the communist movement's main and secondary deviations from the correct line on these questions.

Major contributions could and should respond directly to each other; comrades with short questions or suggestions to make could send in short letters. Everyone would know where to read the latest contributions to the debate over party-building line. Printing the mailing addresses of contributors and perhaps a "bulletin board" section in the back would permit comrades with similar views to get in touch with each other directly, assuming certain security guidelines were established. Polemics in the journal would help

prepare the conditions for moving the struggle forward through forums and conferences, sponsored either by the committee publishing the journal or by other comrades.

We suggested joint publication of such a journal privately to some other groups months ago. We have not begun it ourselves for two reasons. First, we lack the human and financial resources to undertake it alone. Second, our contacts are, in the main, limited to the "Albania-leaning" section of the movement. For a journal to establish itself as a periodical to which all articles on party-building should be sent and as a publication that all comrades outside the parties should read, it would have to be a joint project of some forces from each section of the non-party communists.

We encourage correspondence on this proposal, and particularly offers to help implement it. Such offers could range from willingness to discuss joint responsibility for publishing, to willingness to help distribute the journal or contribute to it financially. At the very least, comrades who support this idea but can do little to help implement it should inform us of their interest, and they should try to persuade organizations to which they are close to assist in the publication of such a journal.

A periodical devoted solely to discussion of party-building would probably be needed only until a party-building organization is formed.¹ The timing and method of formation of the party-building network will depend largely on who our forces are, which can be gauged only as the struggle over various proposals develops. Some groups could conceivably begin to link up almost immediately, with the degree of line unity being so high that the immediate questions would be the practical ones of committing human and financial resources to the work of the network, setting up its organizational structure, arranging secret forms of communication, and developing an agenda for taking up questions of line and theoretical investigations. More likely, there will be a period of a year or more of struggle over party-building line in general, especially the question of lines of demarcation, before there are forces ready to link up, based on a common view of our tasks and who is capable of taking them up.

But that struggle itself needs to be organized, and the creation and promotion of a journal on party-building line is the logical next step.

¹Our references to the formation of a party-building organization are not meant as a slight to the existing OCIC. Such references do, however, reflect our belief that the OCIC is not a *viable* party-building organization. It is both too *exclusive* (in demanding agreement that the U.S. is the main danger to the world's people, instead of only that it is the main enemy for the U.S. proletariat to fight) and too *inclusive* (lacking unity on party-building line).

VII

Uniting With Marxist-Leninists: Those Outside the Party-Building Organization

The network's own development will be a key part of uniting Marxist-Leninists, but it obviously cannot be the only part. For outside of the group will be all those in the existing self-proclaimed vanguard parties, as well as those who did not agree with some part of the unity required to join the network.

If the history of revolutionary movements is any guide, unity among *all* these forces is unachievable. As a consistent Marxist-Leninist trend develops, many comrades will gravitate towards it, but the forces they leave behind will probably consolidate around more consistent and more clearly non-Marxist varieties of socialism, rather than just the serious deviations which they already manifest.¹

No one can spell out how the process of winning over the better comrades will unfold, but there will certainly be a dialectical relationship between the network's taking up its tasks, and the building of broader unity and the defeat of the opportunist lines. If comrades in a party-building organization develop our theory, improve our mass work, deepen our unity, see to it that comrades whose main work is in practice also have a good grasp of theory, develop good communist styles of work, and begin to recruit workers, we will become a definite tendency within the communist movement and—at some point, a real trend within the workers' movement. Such a development, combined with patient struggles with rank-and-file members of the existing parties and with working-class pressure for communist unity, will help create the conditions in which some comrades will become disillusioned with the opportunist tendencies which they are with now and will develop increasing unity with us

¹For an explanation of why we consider it incorrect to treat the existing parties as if such consolidation and such consistent opportunism are already proven, see our pamphlet *Party-Formation and the Circle Spirit: A Reply to the MLOC*, pp. 5-7, 10-15.

Nearly everyone at least pays lip service to the idea of winning many "honest comrades" away from the existing parties. Therefore, in the present general discussion of how to unite with them, it is not necessary to go into whether it is mainly a matter of winning them to Marxism-Leninism from other ideologies or winning them to consistent Marxism-Leninism from serious opportunist deviations in its application.

(while pointing out some of our own shortcomings to us).

In the absence of testing how a positive example of consistent Marxism-Leninism affects comrades aligned with the various deviations, it is impossible to judge confidently how *consolidated* they are. What is predictable is that taking up our communist tasks well will assist the process of broader communist unification. What is not predictable is how much can happen before changes in the objective situation make the opportunist lines even more clearly untenable, whether there are any parties which might undergo serious rectification and be won over as a body, or whether unification will come solely through defections from their ranks, whether the kind of unity committee we described elsewhere will ever be a practical solution,² etc. Nor can anyone predict for certain how much of this process is possible before we have developed into a party ourselves.

It will clearly take the building of another active political tendency to begin this process of unification at all, and it must be a tendency that actually takes up our theoretical and practical tasks. We emphasize this point because we firmly disagree with the P.U.L., which seems to believe that first comrades must struggle to win virtually the entire movement to a unified analysis of the situation, our tasks, and the forms of opportunism that have been preventing us from carrying them out well, before a section of the movement should take up those tasks.³ This is an idealist line. Though we should avoid the sectarian error of parties which have no time for struggle with anyone else and believe that unity will be won *only* when others see the success of their line in practice, there is enough opportunism among those forces—including opportunist avoidance of ideological struggle—that such struggle and their own negative experiences will be insufficient to win them over. These must be combined with

²In *Learning From Past Mistakes to Avoid Future Ones in the Struggle for Unity*, we responded to alleged unity proposals made by the MLOC and the CP(M-L) by saying that any serious efforts at unifying most communists would require a multilateral form (not the MLOC's closed bilateral negotiations), a rule that all major polemics be studied and discussed by all members of participating groups, and a serious commitment of a good deal of time.

³This is the essence of the P.U.L.'s line, despite occasional contrary statements in their text. For they consider it wrong to form a party that does not unite all or most communists (pp. 88-91). They see ideological struggle or else developments in objective conditions as the primary means to achieve unity (197-238, especially pp. 235 and 237-38). They so de-emphasize the development of political line prior to formation of this party that unites the movement that the emergence of a consistent political trend before such unification would be impossible (pp. 47, 200-20), and they question whether significant agitational work among the working-class masses will be possible even for a time after the party is formed (53, 208), although they also do acknowledge the need for agitation (30, 208). They do state firmly, but almost as an afterthought, that unification of existing communists will be impossible without deepening our fusion with the working-class vanguard (229-33). Overall, there is no conception of the largely separate development of a consistent Marxist-Leninist trend, through its taking up today the theoretical, practical, and organizational tasks which all communists *should* be taking up, as the bridge to eventual unification with other forces. Instead they hope to consolidate anti-“left”-sectarian forces for the struggle to win over the rest of the movement.

the positive example of our work. They must also be combined with the kind of struggle with the *rank and file* of these groups that will be impossible except where we are engaged in common practice with them. (And such struggle should definitely take place, which is one reason why the network should assign forces to prepare reports on the lines of these organizations. Another reason is that we can probably learn something from the other parties, despite their opportunism.)

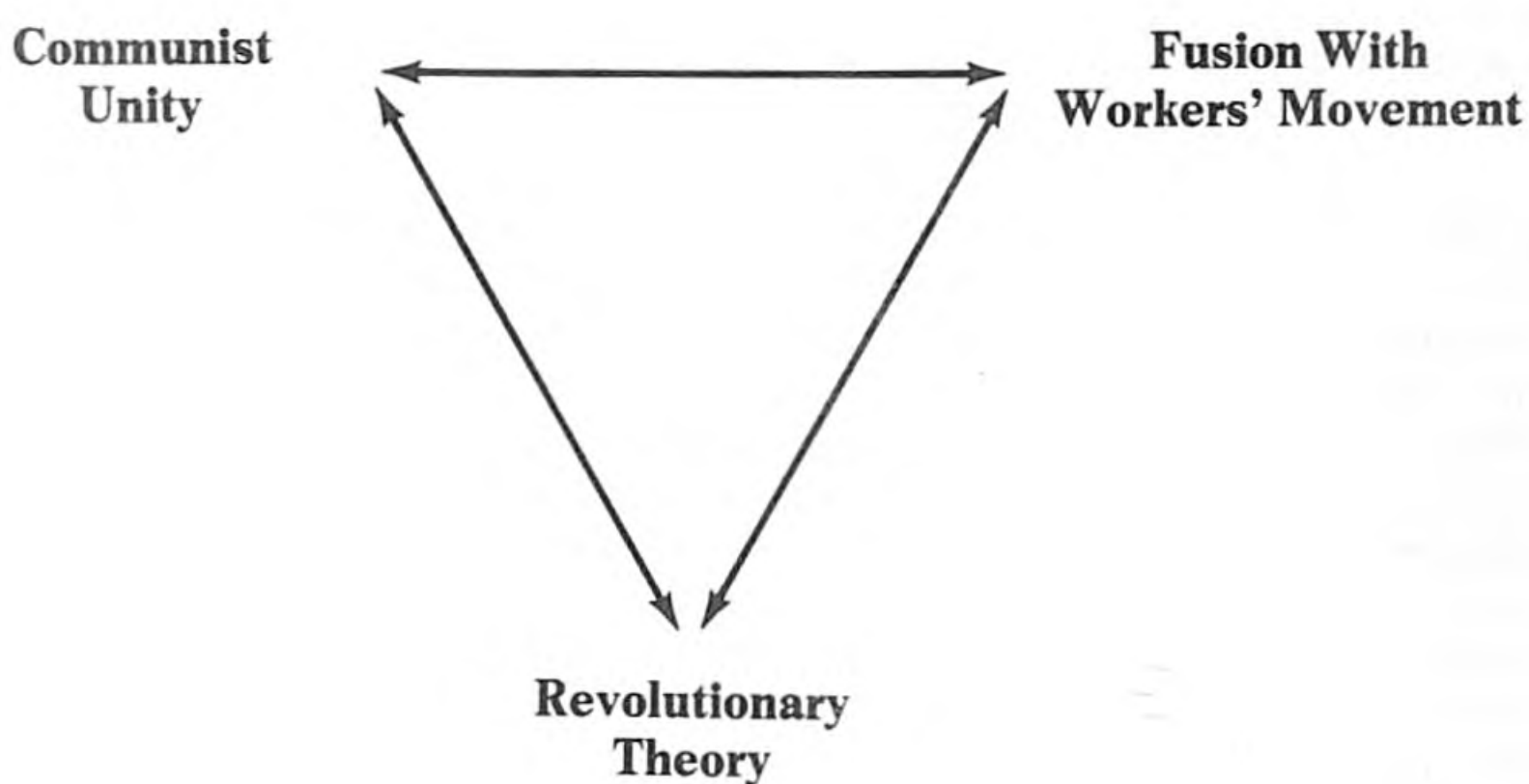
It is right opportunism to neglect the urgent theoretical and practical work that a part of the communist movement could be doing, out of fear of proceeding without uniting the entire movement. As we have tried to show already, a small number of people can make progress on these tasks—even if far less than a unified party could—and the unity itself will never come if, in the main, we spend our time just arguing for it. Despite the P.U.L.'s heavy focus on criticizing "left" sectarianism, they overlook the fact that at present it is strong enough to prevent us from even influencing the existing parties in any way until our theory and our practice start opening the minds of rank-and-file communists working alongside us. Polemic after dazzling polemic by the anti-"left" tendency which the P.U.L. speaks of organizing would go unread by these other forces in the meantime. So we cannot wait until they are won over before taking up our other work in a very serious way.

Building the organization to take up this work and develop another tendency is as important to our work as the theoretical and practical tasks themselves.

VIII

The Interrelationships Among Our Tasks

We stated at the beginning of this pamphlet that an effective communist party needs advanced theory, fusion with the workers' movement, and communist unity, requirements which U.S. communists are lacking at present. (We are not, however, saying that no party should be *formed* until these conditions are at a high level. We consider further the preconditions for party formation in the next chapter.) Communists' three kinds of *tasks*—theoretical, practical, and organizational—correspond only roughly to these three *requirements for a strong party*, and each task helps promote all three. We will consider these dialectical relationships in some detail, before seeking to identify the key link among them. The diagram helps identify these interactions, although it says nothing about their content.



Analysis of the relationship between each pair of these requirements for fully effective communist work shows that an improvement in any one will move the other two forward. Put differently, the very low level in each is a

serious obstacle to raising the level of the other two. However, to move the work forward, we must figure out which obstacle in this vicious circle of obstacles is most susceptible to an attack which can permit us to move forward on all three fronts. This is the classic situation of the need to grasp what Lenin called the key link.

To begin with, if communists develop greater unity, we will broaden our resources for doing investigation and other theoretical work. In addition, our ability to do agitation and propaganda would be enhanced by our greater resources and our ability to learn from broader experience, so greater unity would also help deepen fusion. Moreover, in any practical struggle, we would greatly improve our ability to win over workers by eliminating the fragmentation and competitiveness that cause so much damage when communists who act antagonistically towards each other are working in the same mass struggle.

Second, the closer our relationships with the workers, and the greater the proletarian presence among communists, the better will be our knowledge of concrete conditions and the more will our theory be enriched and corrected by the workers' knowledge and class stand. Greater fusion would also give a tremendous impetus to communist unity. Workers generally oppose destructive petty bourgeois and intellectualist tendencies such as sectarianism, squabbling, anarchism, and slavishness. In addition, the demands of intense practical struggles—which greater fusion presupposes our involvement in—will help us all see how those tendencies get in our way.

However, the main obstacle to all our work, and the one most susceptible to attack, is our tremendous theoretical weakness, in the areas of political line, of broader study of U.S. conditions and development, and, all too often, of fundamentals of Marxism-Leninism. We will not repeat here our entire chapter on the need for theoretical work but will simply restate its conclusions. If communists unite on a firm and principled basis, it will be on the line developed by our theoretical work (enriched, of course, by practice). As for fusion, only when our agitation among the workers is based on a correct and fully elaborated theoretical understanding of this society can the addition of socialist agitation to the crucible of class struggle bring forward many advanced and intermediate workers. The better that theory is developed, the greater will be our success in using propaganda, sometimes to the masses, but especially in winning the class vanguard to *scientific* socialism. In sum, for those Marxist-Leninists not tied to sectarian parties,¹ the main obstacle to unity and to fusion is theoretical weakness: ideological confusion and vagueness on political line, and the absence of a comprehensive view of the social phenomena in our country and a scientific analysis of the contradictions according to which these phenomena are developing. While the lack of unity, the separation of the communist and workers' movements, and also lack of

¹For those who are tied to such organizations, the sectarianism itself is generally a major barrier to struggle over other line differences and the opportunism which they often reflect. As we explained in the previous chapter, a serious struggle with the members of these groups can only be effective once we develop a more consistently Marxist trend. Thus the unification of *all* communists cannot be the key link in party-building in the present period, because such unification is impossible.

training do hinder communists' ability to do the theoretical work, none of these is the main obstacle to that work or provides the key to moving it forward. The main obstacle is not an objective limitation at all, but our "left" and right failures to take seriously the need—and our ability—to *take up* our theoretical tasks.² We can make real advances in theoretical work by beginning that work, but our progress in promoting fusion and in unifying communists cannot accelerate substantially until the development of theory moves forward.

These few words do not give adequate attention to the views that deepening fusion is the primary aspect of party-building (PWOC, P.S.O., and others, and the former A.T.M. from another angle), that unifying the communist movement is (P.U.L.), or that unifying a section of the communist movement is (*Guardian*). However, we did discuss these lines fully in Chapter III (communists' practical tasks) and Chapter VII (unifying the communist movement).

We said that the three kinds of tasks do not neatly correspond to the three requirements communists must meet for their party to be a real vanguard organization. The relationship between our theoretical task, however, and the development of revolutionary theory is obviously very direct: carrying out those tasks is the primary way of reaching the goal. But our practice will contribute, in an indispensable way, to our ability to understand this society, and organizing ourselves into a network is essential for being able to carry out and propagate the theoretical work. Our practical tasks are primarily aimed at fusing communism with the workers' movement and are the main means for doing it, but our success in deepening fusion is also greatly dependent on both our theoretical and our organizational work. And communist unity—both in the short run among those who can be united into a party-building tendency now, and in the long run in winning others over—requires a great deal of theoretical struggle, the results of practical experience, and the organizational steps that permit a degree of unification in our work that corresponds to our level of ideological unity.

Though our diagram on the goals of party-building work (theory, fusion, and unity) may be easy to remember, if comrades wish to keep in mind a fairly simple crystallization of the Pacific Collective's party-building line, what they should emphasize is the *tasks* of communists in this period: theoretical practical, and organizational, for this is the list of things that we must be doing. Theoretical work is, in our opinion, definitely the key link among these, but this concept should not be misused to belittle the other tasks or exaggerate our ability to do theoretical work apart from the others. Thus we would never substitute the statement "party-building is essentially developing theory" for others' statements that "party-building is, in essence, fusion" or "party-building is uniting Marxist-Leninists." Real inattention to either practical or organizational work would, for as long as it prevailed, be fatal. Even noticeable neglect of our work in either sphere would damage the whole.

In addition, our statement that theoretical work is the key link among

²Again, we are speaking of the main obstacle among the potential party-building forces. The existing parties' inattention to theory, or their development of bad theory, takes different forms with each group and is beyond the scope of the present discussion.

party-building tasks should not be confused with our position that party-building line is, in the most immediate period, the key link in moving all communist work forward. Effective party-building work will not take place until the forces that can unite on the correct party-building line do so, and until they translate that unity into an organizational form. What we are stating in this chapter, however, is part of our analysis of *what is* the correct party-building line that comrades should unite on. That line holds that among the tasks of a pre-party network, theory is primary.

MAKING THEORY PRIMARY

The implications of the primacy of theory cannot be spelled out very concretely, since one must visualize the work of an as-yet nonexistent party-building organization. But we can make some general observations. Making theory primary does not necessarily mean that, of the human resources available for communist work, a greater quantity should be devoted to developing and struggling over theory. For one thing, any serious mass work is extremely time-consuming and, for reasons explained in an earlier chapter, such work cannot be dispensed with. Moreover, the resources which we can devote to theoretical projects at any given time will depend on how many people are qualified, or can be trained, to do such work.

But what is crucial is that we keep reminding ourselves that our practice, as demanding of our time as it seems to be, is a part of party-building, and *that the longer we lack a party, the longer the period when the political effectiveness of our practice will be extremely limited*. More particularly, we must remember that our practice cannot accomplish very much for as long as we limp along without a tremendous qualitative improvement in the theory that should both guide the practice and make our agitation and propaganda far more effective than they can be now. These are harsh words, but they state a conclusion that is inescapable if one grasps the *meanings* both of the principle that the vanguard party is indispensable for leading the class struggle of the proletariat, and of the fact that the key link among the tasks needed to build that party is theory.

An organization thus conscious of the primacy of theory will do its utmost to train and mobilize those capable of doing theoretical work. It will support and criticize that work by insisting that those comrades engaged mainly in practice be given time to contribute their knowledge and opinions. Finally, it will urge its constituent circles to try to support some of their members as full-time cadres who can concentrate on the network's theoretical work, while remaining linked to practice. (To us it is clear that neither the theoretical nor the organizational work will receive anything near adequate attention without full-time, or nearly full-time, cadres. If there is controversy over the necessity and the advisability of such a division of labor, we can elaborate our views on this later.)

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The immediate goal of the theoretical, practical, and organizational work is to enable us to form a communist party, guided as much as possible by a correct line, including as many worker-communists as can develop in the pre-party period, capable of rectifying its errors, and capable of continuing the

work of party-building so that it can become in fact the leading organization of the U.S. working class. In the next chapter we return to the question of when the transition to the party form can be made.

IX

Preconditions for Party-Formation

In Chapter IV we already stated that dispersed, democratic-centralist organizations, with authoritative party press, central decisions to undertake nationwide campaigns, etc., are parties whether they so call themselves or not. We explained that such organizations should not form in the absence of (1) a program,¹ (2) tested leadership, and (3) basic unity on how democratic centralism should function. Here we simply add an explanation why these are the *only* preconditions for adopting democratic centralism in a national organization. We also go more deeply into why it must be understood that a nationwide democratic-centralist organization is a party, regardless of what it calls itself and regardless of whether or not it is the party of the working-class vanguard.

(We urge comrades to remember that we have introduced this separate question of when to *call* an organization a party. Some comrades, who do not for a moment doubt that a national democratic-centralist organization should be formed without waiting for a high level of fusion or for unification of most communists, *think* that they disagree with us when we say that a party can be formed without such conditions being met. They forget that when we say "party," we mean a national democratic-centralist organization.)

Despite the importance of a body of theory, a qualitative leap in fusion, and the unification of most communists for building a party that truly leads the U.S. proletariat, none of these conditions is a prerequisite for *formation* of a party. When a looser organization of communists, in some minimal numbers and with broad geographic representation, has met the preconditions stated two paragraphs previously, it should form a party. Then we can continue our

¹We mean a program in the usual sense of a comprehensive statement of the party's short- and long-term "aims and objects," since a Leninist party will do agitation and propaganda around all of these and must have agreement on them. However, it would be wrong to be rigid about this. Some circumstances could demand unity around a much more basic program. For example, the outbreak of war between the superpowers could demand unification on a basic anti-war, anti-fascist program (cf. that of the new Albanian party after the Italian invasion of 1929), with differences on other questions left unresolved while the questions are studied. It would be a tremendous disadvantage to have the party press carrying a debate on the Black national question or trade-union work, and comrades in one party putting forward different lines among the people; but the need for organizational unification in those circumstances would probably outweigh the weaknesses.

theoretical and practical work and the struggle for broader communist unity, using all the advantages that democratic centralism can give us. One set of factors determines when communists can organize ourselves in a certain manner; the other determines when the organization will be capable of playing the leading role that it must eventually play in the class struggle.

But this is not as simple as it sounds. Neither the program, nor the leadership, nor the unity on principles of party organization will come easily and quickly. Each will require substantial theoretical study, struggle, and experience in practice—no doubt several years' worth. These will also produce more communists in our tendency, both from among other forces existing today and from among the workers themselves.

But it is important to keep in mind the distinction, first clarified for us by the P.U.L.'s book, between party-building in general, which continues long after formation of the party, and party-formation. Obviously the more communists we unite, the stronger will be our party. And obviously the deeper fusion is, the more—by definition—will the party be playing a true vanguard role. And, just as obviously, the more we develop our theory, the more we will be able to increase both fusion and communist unity. But *formation* of a party, and use of all the advantages of democratic centralism, does not per se require a particular level of any of these factors, except for the theory needed to adopt a program.

Confusion on this issue comes from the fact that most of today's parties not only finally admitted that they are parties, but claimed to be *the* vanguard party, uniting most honest communists, and including the vanguard of the working class. Such outrageous claims have been unanimously rejected each time some small part of the movement made them, but somewhere in the process most of us assimilated an assumption that either the claim about communist unity, the claim about the group's vanguard character, or both, should be true before a party can be formed.

We disagree. When a network of communist circles has enough line unity, good enough leaders, and carefully-acquired unity on how a party should function so that it can divide labor more thoroughly and let the leaders lead a democratic-centralist party which implements a single line in practice, we should do so. We will probably still put more resources into theoretical work than today's parties, acknowledge far more work to be done in deepening fusion, and press much more seriously for communist unification, rather than suddenly springing forth as if we are totally armed to lead the masses. But we would be ready to take advantage of the unity of will and action and the division of labor that democratic centralism permits. What we should not do is make one more voluntarist, sectarian proclamation that we are *the* party, the vanguard of the working class, the organization of practically all real communists. Unfortunately, we will probably be neither for some years after we are able to consolidate our organization into a party. But that consolidation will enable us to better do our work of further studying the society, deepening fusion and providing what leadership we can in the class struggle, and struggling to win over other communists to our trend. Hence there is no reason to deprive ourselves of the Leninist instrument for doing this work until we can honestly claim to have united the communist movement or to be unquestioned leaders of the working class.

IS FUSION A PRECONDITION?

The most thorough critique which we have heard of party-building lines which fail to specify some meaningful level of fusion as a precondition for party-formation came not from "party-building-is-fusion" advocates, but in a discussion with a "pro-P.L.A." circle in the Midwest. They raised three main points. First, the working class must emancipate itself. Regardless of its line, a party composed almost entirely of comrades from petty bourgeois strata cannot lead the working class to revolution. The advanced workers, in particular, determine the character of the workers' movement, and any party which seeks to lead the movement must have them within its ranks. How, they ask, can a party hope to lead the mass movement if those who would form it have not even been able to help develop and win over the class vanguard?

Second, by working to form another party without requiring it to be, at least in some measure, a party with a true proletarian vanguard character, we would hold open the gate to the opportunist path that the existing parties have traveled. Those who fail to state some level of fusion as a precondition for party-formation free themselves to be the next group to voluntaristically declare themselves The Party after expanding a little, establishing their press, and recruiting a few workers.

Finally, we speak of the need to develop tested leadership, recognizing that part of the problem with the existing parties is their careerist leaders, combined with a rank and file that slavishly follows those leaders, despite their failure to prove themselves in the class struggle. Yet how do we expect to see leaders tested, if not through successful practice? And success can only be gauged by some real strides in deepening fusion.

There is a great deal of truth in each of these arguments, but the fact remains that there is no specified level of fusion that must be met before Marxist-Leninists in a loose network form of organization can move all their work forward by adopting the party form.

The comrades' comments lead us to add three observations to what we have already said about preconditions for effective use of the party form. First, when we speak of tested leadership, part of the "testing" takes place in practice, in the class struggle. As the work of comrades in the network progresses, some will prove to be much better than others at analyzing concrete conditions and providing communist leadership to mass struggles, leadership that can be seen because it is being followed by people, and because it is leading to some success in winning the best of the workers over to a communist analysis.

However, at least for the purpose of evaluating leaders, it would be a mistake to state in advance the *degree* of influence within the working class that such comrades must help us develop (e.g., the PWOC's and others' descriptions of developing a visible, somewhat accepted "communist current" within the working-class movement). Objective conditions could conceivably be unfavorable for dramatic advances in fusion, regardless of the talent and dedication of the comrades doing or guiding mass work. But good communists can facilitate the progressive development of any situation in the class struggle. Thus one attribute of those who develop as leaders should be their ability to do the best communist work that it appears can be done under the

circumstances. (It is, of course, necessary to struggle against subjectivism in evaluating such work.)

Naturally, practical leadership is not the only attribute we will be looking for. We must also judge people and groups on their theoretical contributions, the part they play in the ideological struggle, their role in tackling the organizational work of the network, etc. But it would be a real mistake to speak of tested leadership and not make it clear that the criterion of success in practice is one of the "tests."

Second, if the level of fusion is still low at the time a party is formed, we must be particularly careful to recognize that its line has only been verified in practice to a very limited extent, and the testing of its leaders is similarly limited. Then we can be wary of what would be over-centralization in those circumstances, as well as of a sectarian attitude towards the masses, from whom we would still have very much to learn. And in our attitude towards other parties, too, it would be especially important under such conditions to keep in mind that we do not know everything ourselves.

Third, we want to reemphasize that the distinction between party-formation and the continuing process of party-building would be especially important for a party lacking much of a vanguard character. Adoption of the democratic-centralist form would be for the purpose of best organizing ourselves to *become* a true vanguard party. Reaching the point of party-formation would just be "the first step in a journey of 10,000 *li*" (Mao), not the occasion for trumpets heralding the birth of a fully-developed vanguard party of the U.S. proletariat.

It is the struggle to grasp our tasks in periods of party-formation and further party-building that will keep us from imitating the worst aspects of the existing self-declared "vanguards." What was primarily wrong with each of them was not that when they evolved into party-type organizations the level of fusion was still too low. The problem was that the line which most have by now stated in their programs was neither comprehensive nor fully correct, that they had opportunist leaders, and that they did not understand how to use democratic centralism (especially with a largely untested line). Otherwise it would have been correct to divide their labor in a way that gave them a topical national newspaper, other political literature, the ability to rely on good theoretical workers to develop and propagate analyses of concrete conditions, and freedom for a large majority of the membership to devote their attention to practice (though not as "free" as they are when bureaucratic centralism *overemphasizes* the role of leadership in developing line). Such a division of labor would have led to a qualitative leap in their ability to do the theoretical and practical work that would help develop and recruit a working-class vanguard, a process which in turn would have helped them gradually draw other communists away from opportunist-dominated parties.

For those remaining outside of these parties, it is certainly true that the better the class composition of our forces, the better we will be able to develop and implement a correct line. But the fact remains that communists who have worked together in a network on our theoretical, practical, and organizational tasks, to the point where a substantial group of them have met the preconditions we have listed, should not hold on to the primitive network form solely on the ground that the party we would form would have yet to be that of

the true class vanguard. To do so would unnecessarily retard our ability to continue to help that vanguard develop.

The Chinese party formed by delegates representing 57 members was not such a vanguard (though we should not forget that it also did not establish strong democratic centralism in the early days). In Albania, the numbers were, relative to the population, far larger, but the party history tells us that the newly-formed communist party “inherited very weak connections with the masses” from its predecessor groups.² If things were better in seething Russia, it was largely because conditions permitted them to be different, not because the communists had awaited a deeper level of fusion before adopting the highest level of organization that they were capable of using. (And we remind comrades that the famous quotations³ about the period of winning over the vanguard in Russia refer to a period that lasted until the 1905 mass revolutionary upsurge, two years after the congress that created a democratic-centralist party.)

IS COMMUNIST UNITY A PRECONDITION?

We have very little to say here. It would simply be irrational for those communists who are united enough to use the democratic-centralist party form to wait until they have achieved unification of the entire communist movement. Even assuming that something close to such unification will someday be possible, the struggle for it can be carried out far more effectively using the strengths which democratic centralism will give to the theory and practice which will form the bases for other comrades’ assessments of us, as well as to our capacity to wage ideological struggle with them.

WHEN TO CALL A PARTY A PARTY

Even if we have correctly identified the conditions that permit use of the democratic-centralist, party-type form of organization, is it correct to call such a group a communist party if it is basically non-proletarian in composition, or if it unites only one section of U.S. communists? Yes, it is. True, if members of such bodies call their groups pre-party organizations, they might remind themselves, and be open to others, about the magnitude of their tasks in deepening fusion and in uniting with other communists. Yet this “pre-party” terminology has become standard among U.S. communists, without helping the members of such groups resist gross subjectivism in evaluating fusion and whether they have united most honest communists. Its real impact is that it obscures one of the truly fundamental errors of the existing democratic-centralist organizations: that they skipped to the Leninist party form of organization without preparing the conditions in which that form can be used to advance the work.

Those “pre-parties” which were to declare themselves The Party often printed Stalin’s description of what a communist party must strive to be—the organized vanguard of the working class. But they ignored the dialectics of a

²*History of the P.L.A.*, p. 99.

³See Appendix A.

party's development into such an organization, as if every true party is a capable and functioning "general staff" of the working-class movement when its founding congress adjourns. By collapsing the distinctions between party-building before and after formation of the party, these groups thus presented us with a false syllogism:⁴

A communist party is the organized vanguard of the working class.

We are a communist party.

Therefore we are the organized vanguard of the working class.

We escape (and expose) the faulty logic only by correcting the first premise's failure to distinguish between different periods of party-building, its implicit denial that new parties often must work to *become* the organized vanguard. Instead, most comrades, knowing that the conclusion is absurd, have turned the syllogism into its obverse, like this:

A communist party is the organized vanguard of the working class.

You are obviously not the organized vanguard of the working class.

Therefore you are not a communist party.

The same mistake can be made by turning the fact that a communist party *should* unite a country's communists into the assertion that it is not a party when it has not done so. These approaches to the problem deny the possibility that the form of organization might well be that of a small party, but one which has much arduous work ahead of it—and perhaps much rectification—before it can become the true proletarian vanguard party and the sole organization of communists.

The terminology we are struggling for is new in our movement, but it is not new for Marxist-Leninists historically. As mentioned above, the Chinese and Albanian comrades formed organizations which they called parties before they acquired their vanguard role. And when there is more than one party in other countries, it is not generally the practice, even here, to call only the one judged most correct and most proletarian a party, while the other is labeled something else. (Cf. Lenin's discussion of the possible formation of two communist parties in Britain.⁵) Being *a* party does not necessarily mean being *the* party, if the terms are used correctly.

All that the term *party* names is a particular form of organization. A political grouping might be a democratic-centralist party, a social-democratic-type party, a national federation of circles, a regional federation of circles, a local circle, a study group, or just two comrades living together. The question of what a group's form of organization is does not depend on the correctness of the comrades' line, their political success, their class backgrounds, or the degree to which they have united Marxist-Leninists. If it is a party, such factors *would* help us identify its most urgent tasks, and they *would* tell us whether it is an effective party or an ineffective one, one just beginning its

⁴A syllogism is an argument in which a conclusion logically follows from the assertion of two premises, as in the text above.

⁵Letter to Sylvia Pankhurst, LCW 29: 565.

work or one that is well developed, a revolutionary one or a revisionist one. History has certainly produced all of these. But holding back the term *party*—as a coveted title to be bestowed only on the correct, effective, united vanguard party—has only the advantage of being one (not the only) method of reminding ourselves not to be satisfied with an organization that is not yet such a vanguard organization. The other, more precise use of the term *party* has the far greater advantage of helping clear away the confusion about what the existing parties have done (and what we must not do).

For, as we have said, what they did was leap into the party form of organization long before acquiring programmatic unity, a body of experience by which to judge the leadership provided by different comrades or circles, and agreement on the nature of the party. And this form which they adopted is the one adapted to the *functions* of a party, which they did try to carry out (in a bureaucratically distorted manner) practically from the beginning: most members concentrate on trying to lead the proletarian struggle, by making use of centralized ideological and practical guidance.

The transition from the respective "pre-parties" to their announced parties was so inconsequential not because they are still not parties, as many think, but because their "founding congresses" only formalized and ratified a state of affairs that had existed for a long time. For each one, premature party-formation took place several years before the point at which most people identify it. What the party congresses of each group usually added was the open claim that the party is *The Party* (i.e., that there are few communists outside its ranks) and the claim that it is in fact *The Vanguard Party* (minimizing its work of fusing communism with the workers' movement and minimizing the weaknesses inherent in its true composition).

Call these groups terrible parties, poor excuses for the communist party, marginally effective petty bourgeois sects that do not even know that that is what they are, or whatever. But let us not call them democratic-centralist pre-party organizations masquerading as parties. That charge accepts and strengthens the concept that has in reality given powerful ideological assistance to the premature formation of *parties which masqueraded as pre-parties*.

STILL ANOTHER PARTY?

We hope that our position on conditions for party-formation does not bring the reader to a crowning disappointment. "What?! One hundred fifty-one pages on a supposedly new party-building line, and they end up saying that presently unaffiliated forces should just form one more party?" If people think this, they are forgetting the *content* of those 151 pages. The idea that another party will be formed, perhaps while all the others still exist, comes from a sober assessment of the strength of the opportunism in those organizations and the hold their leaderships have on their members. Fragmentation of our movement, in the context of the rise of opportunism and confusion internationally, has consolidated itself in organizational forms and sectarian attitudes toward struggle that mean unification of this movement will be a difficult, slow process. It will probably require much harsher objective conditions, as well as a highly organized, more consistently Marxist-Leninist,

more proletarian trend to struggle with the other forces. What is different in our party-building line from that which built the others is what we propose for creating that trend: (1) taking up, *really* taking up, crucial and long-neglected theoretical work; (2) doing concurrent practice, including broad mass agitation and organizing work, as well as propaganda to the most developed workers, but without delusions on the degree of fusion today; and (3) painstakingly building an organization that can carry out the theoretical work, share what we learn from practice, and carry out an open, uninhibited struggle against all the forms of confusion and opportunism that we will undoubtedly run into, instead of entrusting all this to slick careerist leaders, while the rest of us implement their line and brush off any contrary views as those of "anti-party" or opportunist forces.

Moreover, comrades with what, in this country, is a rare ability to assess problems of party-building objectively will be able to solve other problems better as well. Obviously the *content* of our line and tactics, not just our methods for arriving at them, will be different from what the existing parties have produced. It is not merely disagreements on party-building line that keep so many of us out of those parties, for the opportunism manifested in voluntarist party-building lines comes out in many other areas as well. But clarity on our theoretical and practical tasks, and organizing to create the best conditions for systematic line struggle, will permit us to develop the correct political lines and methods of mass work as well.

SUMMARY

The theoretical, practical, and organizational work that we call on non-party communists to undertake will undoubtedly strengthen the link between those comrades and at least parts of the workers' movement, before adoption of the party form. Successful work will also unite more communists than those who first began the enterprise. However, specified levels of neither fusion nor unification with other communists will be required before we can make the transition from the network form to the democratic-centralist party form that will permit us, under consistent Marxist-Leninist leadership, to do all our work better. Thus we do not dispute the point that what the working class needs is a true proletarian vanguard party, but reply that under the right conditions the communists seeking to build *such* a party can do so better and faster by moving to the party form of organization. Communists must try to seal off the voluntarist path which others have traveled not by specifying some level of fusion or unity as a precondition for forming a party, but rather those preconditions that are really required for a new young party to take up its work with an expectation of more success than a lower form of organization can achieve. Those preconditions are unity on program, tested leadership, and unity on a correct conception of what a communist party must be and how it should function.

As for how leadership is to be developed and tested, the practical arena of the class struggle is one place where such development and testing must take place. It is wrong, however, to accept the possibility of having to wait for class contradictions to grow sharper, to permit good leadership to be demonstrated by a significant degree of fusion of the communist and workers' movements. Such leadership can be demonstrated by its ability to maximize whatever progress is possible under existing conditions, as well as by its leading role in helping us carry out our other tasks.

We call the preconditions which we have listed preconditions for party formation, not just preconditions for use of full democratic centralism, because an organization should be called a party when it adopts the party form. The

international communist movement has not reserved the term for organizations that achieve a vanguard character or which are the sole significant communist groups in their countries. In the U.S., our calling parties "pre-parties" masked their adoption of the party form without meeting any of the preconditions for its effective use.

Conclusion

Unfortunately, many of the comrades who must begin laying the foundations for a true vanguard party are among the least experienced in our movement. We can see why some wait for someone else to build the party. But they should not wait, for so many of those who have been in the movement longer either have gone too far on the wrong track in their present parties, or have dropped away, too disappointed in how they saw things going.

Those who are less sure of themselves, however, who are open to learning from each other and from the workers, yet who are also determined not to follow anyone uncritically, no matter how well developed they appear to be—such comrades can be among the best in the movement, despite their real shortcomings. They can do far more at present than those who deny the immensity of our tasks; pretend that the masses are eagerly hanging on their every word (or who fear that saying any words will alienate the people); propose yet another “unity plan” that ignores the need to involve rank-and-file communists in the broadest line struggle; pretend that their theoretical poverty does not emasculate their attempts at revolutionary practice; and can hear no criticism of their various dual unionist, nationalist, social-chauvinist, or other dangerous political lines and right or “left” methods of mass work.

This greater potential for contributing to the real work of U.S. communists means that every comrade who is not with one of the existing parties must recognize the party-building responsibilities that we all face and take up the struggle. The readers of this and any other works on party-building must make a priority of discussing with their comrades what must be done to build a genuine, revolutionary vanguard party in this country. Then they must begin to play a part in that process.

The struggle to unite some critical mass of communists, or, rather, as many more than that as possible, around a correct party-building line is crucial. We need it; the workers and other oppressed masses of the United States need it; the oppressed and exploited toilers of the world, desperately seeking signs of U.S. imperialism’s internal disintegration, need it. Being a communist in this period means neither simply sitting in a study group or the library, nor passing out bold-sounding leaflets or organizing around local events. It means *actively* joining forces that are seeking the means to build the party that will lead the U.S. working class and its allies to revolution.

As those who have already formed their “vanguard” parties all remind us when they urge us to join them, both the dangerous international situation and the growing economic and political crises are daily increasing the need for communist leadership of the working class. At some point, sharpening contradictions will produce a qualitative leap in the necessity for such

leadership. Neither imperialist war, nor a real threat of fascism, nor an upsurge in the mass movement will wait for the communists to outgrow our theoretical infancy or to do the other work that will permit the development of a stratum of communist workers and their unification in a party.

Today U.S. communists are *nowhere near* being capable of leading a proletarian revolution. Our work does not even have a perceptible impact on the bourgeoisie's freedom of action in conducting the affairs of this country. Yet the means for overcoming our weaknesses are largely at hand. If we merely play at revolution, or if we dabble in "progressive" politics, we will remain as politically irrelevant as we are today. If we are serious and selfless, if we use Marxism-Leninism and use our heads, we can create the young party which, in its maturity, will lead the U.S. working class and its allies in the destruction of a thundering imperialist giant.

APPENDICES

**A. Real History, Versus Scattered Quotations,
On “Propaganda as the Chief Form”**

B. Proposed Basis of Unity for a Party-Building Network

Appendix A

Real History, Versus Scattered Quotations, on “Propaganda as the Chief Form”

As we stated in the chapter on practical tasks in a period of party-building, the line of “propaganda as the chief form of our work” is almost always based on the belief that the Russian Marxists put forward this “principle” for mass work in the period before a proletarian vanguard has been won to communism. The belief is false.

One reference commonly cited in support of it is pp. 16-17 of the *History of the CPSU(B)*. This states that sometime after Lenin came to St. Petersburg, he “proposed to pass from the *propaganda* of Marxism among the few politically advanced workers who gathered in the propaganda circles to political *agitation* among the broad masses of the working class on issues of the day.” However, neither the *History* nor anything we have seen in Lenin’s writings says that it was *correct* for St. Petersburg Marxists to wait as long as they did before beginning broad agitation.¹

In fact, further research into Russian history shows that the opposite is true. The Russian Marxists turned much of their resources to broad mass agitation not at the point when much of the vanguard had been drawn into the party (which Stalin places ten years later), but at the point when they realized the severe limitations of propaganda circles and *discovered* what was then an innovative form of work—agitation. Here is what really happened, according to a sympathetic bourgeois historian:

Beginning as early as 1892, the objective conditions for fruitful activity among the Russian proletariat seemed at hand. . . . The young Marxists understood their task to be the education of the workers. Only recently smitten with “scientific socialism” themselves, they were eager to transmit their new learning to that proletariat which they believed history had cast as the creator of socialism. The desire to establish contact with representatives of the working class led a good many of them to

¹We show below that quotations from Lenin and Stalin about propaganda taking precedence in a time of winning over the vanguard do not contrast propaganda with agitation. Instead they mean propaganda in the general sense of educational work, and contrast it to the mobilization of millions of people in physical battle against the bourgeoisie.

participate in the work of the legal and respectable Committees of Literacy, which provided basic education for workers. Whether in this way or by a more direct approach, numbers of factory operatives were attracted into secret and illegal Social Democratic circles where education—although of a less innocent sort—continued to be the main business. As the saying went, the Social Democrats were attempting to rear the Russian Bebels* of the future.

This phase in the development of Russian Social Democracy is generally referred to as the era of *kruzhkovshchina*—circle work. In effect, it involved the repetition among the workers of much the same type of activity employed for the recruitment and indoctrination of members of the intelligentsia. On this and other scores *kruzhkovshchina* came in for severe criticism toward the mid-nineties. Circle work, the critics contended, failed to fulfill the essential aim of Social Democracy among the workers—the creation of a mass movement. Experience demonstrated that abstract ideas of socialism, even when imbedded in such a rousing work as the *Communist Manifesto*, had little meaning to the average worker. In circle work, the Social Democrats contrived to narrow rather than broaden the scope of the movement. Instead of addressing themselves to the mass, the Marxists were simply drawing from it the most intelligent and able of the literate workers. In concentrating upon the education of a minority, the propagandists left the mass of workers untouched. Such tactics militated against the building of a mass movement, without which aspirations for political liberty and the ultimate triumph of socialism were chimerical.

Perhaps the Social Democrats vaguely envisaged a time when their proteges would themselves undertake to lead the mass of the workers in a struggle for Social Democratic goals. But in actual practice, the critics argued, the circle workers were so preoccupied with their pedagogical duties that they lost sight of what their real ends should be. Even assuming that they retained a vision of those ends, at what point would they or could they break out of the limits imposed by circle work and go over to mass activity? Circle work was likely to be self-perpetuating, inasmuch as the selected workmen who were raised to the intellectual levels of the radical intelligentsia showed a bias for continuation of the same methods. The Social Democrats, instead of calling into life an irresistible working-class movement, might wind up with nothing more to show for their efforts than a handful of worker-intelligentsia who, because of their education, were separated by a wide gulf from those they ought to be leading. If they persisted in such endeavors, the Social Democrats at least should be under no illusions as to the significance of what they were doing; the service they performed was hardly of greater moment than that of the Committees of Literacy.

A critical diagnosis such as this was propounded in an influential pamphlet written in 1894 entitled *Ob agitatsii* (On Agitation). It was based upon the firsthand experience of A. Kremer, a propagandist among the Jewish workers of Vilna. To break out of the enchanted circle, Kremer urged a shift in emphasis from the propagandizing of individuals to agitation among the masses. Theoretical instruction for the most capable workers need not be abandoned, for that would introduce an equally one-sided and false situation. But the chief efforts and forces of the Social Democrats should be directed to the mass of the workers, and this required a different approach. Agitation must rest upon an intimate knowledge of conditions prevailing in the factories. Social Democratic agitators must catch the pulse of the proletarians and attune their appeals to the keenly felt grievances and immediate needs of the workers in the mass. Conducting themselves in this way, the Marxists could mobilize masses of workers in defense of their interests, win their

*August Bebel, an outstanding leader of the German Social Democratic Party, was himself a worker. [Footnote in original.]

confidence in the course of joint struggles, by stages introduce them to the broader ideas and aims of Social Democracy, and finally organize them into Social Democratic battalions to be advanced into the political struggle.² Apart from its other patent advantages, Kremer argued, agitation required only a small expenditure of forces for large gains. A relatively small number of agitators could launch a movement of dimensions that the government would find difficult to control, whereas the circles with their high ratio of intelligentsia to working men were easily and repeatedly wrecked by the police. . . .

Here was a program apparently well suited to the promotion of a Social Democratic mass movement. Sensitive to the force of the arguments against *kruzhkovshchina*, to the disparity between its attainments and the goals of the movement, active propagandists presently were won to the new strategy. Martov, and a little later Lenin, were particularly conspicuous in its popularization and translation into action.³

Other bourgeois historians present a similar picture, some stating that the propaganda circles were becoming tools for education and self-improvement of the more skilled and upwardly mobile workers, while leaving the masses untouched. One states that Lenin "was as vigorously opposed as Martov to what he called the old 'laboratory technique of the development of class consciousness,' and just as convinced that the Social Democrats had to come to grips with the 'spontaneous working-class movement.'"⁴

Furthermore, we know some of the history of the Party of Labor of Albania and of the Communist Party of China, and we have learned of nothing in their experience that shows that it is a universal requirement that the process of fusion begin with propaganda work while agitation is, in the main, delayed. In fact, the new, 200-person Communist Party of Albania took up the struggle to build links with the masses by engaging broadly in propaganda, agitation, and organization among them.⁵ Furthermore, the P.L.A.'s assessment of the work of the pre-party circles consistently praises efforts which some made to do broad mass work and attributes the failure of such work to be carried out more

²In publishing *On Agitation* abroad, the Emancipation of Labour group appended a statement by Axelrod criticizing the pamphlet's tendency to neglect the role of agitation on political issues. (Note by P.C.)

³Samuel H. Baron, *Plekhanov: The Father of Russian Marxism* (Stanford Univ. Press: Stanford, 1963), pp. 147-49.

⁴Leopold H. Haimson, *The Russian Marxists and the Origins of Bolshevism* (Harvard Univ. Press: Cambridge, 1955), p. 73. See also pp. 71-73, and Adam B. Ulam, *The Bolsheviks: The Intellectual and Political Triumph of Communism in Russia* (MacMillan: N.Y., 1965), pp. 117-21, and Richard Pipes, *Social Democracy and the St. Petersburg Labor Movement, 1885-97* (Harvard Univ. Press: Cambridge, 1963). This last book is devoted entirely to an examination of the mass work of the St. Petersburg communists. Pipes states that the Vilno Social-Democrats learned about agitational work from Social-Democrats who were using the technique in Poland.

All these histories agree on the role of Kremer's pamphlet, *On Agitation*. So do Lenin and the editors of his works (*What is to be Done?*, LCW 5: 376 & n. 160), and his wife N.K. Krupskaya (*Reminiscences of Lenin* (International Publishers: N.Y., 1960), pp. 18-19).

⁵*History of the P.L.A.*, pp. 90-91, 99, 102-13.

consistently to Trotskyite influence.⁶

But did not Lenin and Stalin write that the chief form of work in the party-building period was propaganda, to win the vanguard to communism? Yes, those were their words, but the organizations which justify their line by such quotations have the period wrong, totally misunderstand how the term *propaganda* was being used, and, in most cases, narrow the meaning of *vanguard*. The period which Lenin and Stalin spoke of was not only before the League of Struggle and other circles went over to agitation in the mid-'90's. Stalin, accurately citing Lenin, states that the period did not end until the time of mass revolutionary action in 1905.⁷ This period in which "propaganda" was the chief form lasted for 10 years after the Russian Marxists turned to doing widespread mass agitation as well!⁸ In the midst of that period Lenin wrote *The Tasks of the Russian Social-Democrats* and *What is to be Done?*, in which he approved of continuing broad economic agitation and called for the development of widespread and systematic political agitation among the masses of workers. But how could propaganda be the chief form of work for so long after the turn to broad agitation was made?

The answer is that Lenin and Stalin here used the term *propaganda* in its general sense of propagating ideas to the masses (through propaganda and agitation). Stalin did not contrast propaganda with *agitation* when he called it the chief form of work in this entire period, but with "practical action by the masses as a prelude to decisive battles."⁹ Lenin meant something similar when he made the oft-quoted statement,

As long as it was (and inasmuch as it still is) a question of winning the proletariat's vanguard over to the side of communism, priority went and still goes to propaganda work; even propaganda circles, with all their parochial limitations, are useful under these conditions, and produce good results.¹⁰

⁶Ibid., Chapter I, *passim*.

⁷He wrote,

The *first* period [in the development of the RSDLP] was the period of *formation*, of the *creation* of our Party. It embraces the interval of time approximately from the formation of *Iskra* to the Third Party Congress inclusively (end of 1900 to beginning of 1905).

. . . The principal task of communism in Russia in that period was to recruit into the Party the best elements of the working class, those who were most active and most devoted to the cause of the proletariat; to form the ranks of the proletarian party and to put it firmly on its feet. Comrade Lenin formulates this task as follows: "to win the vanguard of the proletariat to the side of communism" (see "*Left-Wing*" *Communism*. . .).

"The Party Before and After Taking Power," SW 5: 103-04.

"To win the vanguard of the proletariat to the side of communism. . . [p]ropaganda . . . [was] the chief form of activity." ("The Political Strategy and Tactics of the Russian Communists," *ibid.*, 83-84.)

⁸See *The Tasks of the Russian Social-Democrats*, LCW 2: 329; "A Retrograde Trend. . .," LCW 4: 279; and the sources cited in fn. 4, above.

⁹"Political Strategy and Tactics. . .," pp. 82-83.

¹⁰"*Left-Wing*" *Communism—An Infantile Disorder*, LCW 31: 93-94.

Continuing, he said that propagandist methods are not enough for moving the masses in their millions into practical action in a revolutionary uprising. He had just said what else is required:

Propaganda and agitation alone are not enough for an entire class, the broad masses of the working people, those oppressed by capital, to take up such a stand [of support for a revolutionary vanguard ready to make the final assault on capital]. For that, the masses must have their own political experience.¹¹

Comrades who think that we are wrong should read the entire section, pp. 92-94. It is clear that the *one sentence* always quoted to support the "propaganda-as-chief-form" line uses *propaganda* in its general sense of educational work among the masses. Lenin contrasted propaganda, in this sense, with mass revolutionary action as a form of struggle and a means for the masses to learn the correctness of the communists' perspective, just as Stalin did later. Enver Hoxha, incidentally, recently interpreted Lenin's remark the same way as we do.¹²

Although such a use of the term *propaganda* is uncommon among communists, it is not unheard of. For example, Lenin had earlier defined the word broadly, as spreading among the workers the results of Marxists' study of the direction of social development among the workers, without specifying the means (as he explained how the slogan "study, propaganda, organization" expresses the correct merger of theory and practice).¹³ Similarly, the *History of the Party of Labor of Albania* describes both "individual agitation" and leaflets as forms that the party's "propaganda" took.¹⁴

Finally, not only do many comrades have the period wrong and misunderstand *propaganda*, but they think that the proletarian "vanguard" which Lenin and Stalin spoke of winning over is only the advanced workers. As we showed in Chapter III, this is incorrect. The vanguard also includes a multitude of intermediate workers who can be won over to membership in the party and active revolutionary work. Thus, "propaganda to the advanced," as many paraphrase Lenin and Stalin, is not what they said or meant.

#

Properly understood, what were Lenin and Stalin saying? That in a period of bringing together, building up, and consolidating the best elements of the working class into a party under consistent Marxist leadership, educational methods (propaganda and widespread agitation) were the chief forms of the communists' work, but that such methods alone do not suffice for bringing the broad masses to the point of support for, and participation in, a revolutionary upsurge. *This* is the only way in which "propaganda" was the chief form of work for the Russian Marxists for a decade after they rectified their early error and began committing a very large part of their resources to agitation.

The whole "propaganda-as-chief-form" episode in our movement gives one

¹¹Ibid., p. 93.

¹²*Imperialism and the Revolution*, reprinted in *Proletarian Internationalism* (COUSML journal), Vol. 1, #2, pp. 65-66.

¹³*What the "Friends of the People Are"*. . . , LCW 1: 298.

¹⁴p. 79.

grounds for reflection. The fact that hundreds of U.S. communists could be so badly duped by two sentences, taken out of context, while many of us should have known perfectly well from the *History of the CPSU(B)* and *What is to be Done?* that the real work of the Russians in the period spoken of consisted largely of agitation, gives a frightening glimpse of the power of dogmatism among us.

Appendix B

Proposed Level of Unity for a Party-Building Network

Note: The purpose of this appendix is to concretize what we think should be the *level* of unity of a party-building organization. What is most important here are the points we think should be covered, the questions that should be answered. The statements that we list are, of course, what we consider to be the correct answers; but we recognize that the struggle over party-building line might produce unity on different positions. The point is that *some* position should be taken on each question covered here.

- I. Our overall purposes and methods are summed up in the science of Marxism-Leninism. Marxism-Leninism must be applied to concrete conditions, rather than used as a dogma, but it includes certain universal principles.
 - A. The main universal principles, which are negated neither by particular conditions in the U.S. nor particular features of the historical period, are these:
 1. Capitalism, including capitalism in its present imperialist stage, inevitably produces exploitation and poverty, war, national oppression, the oppression of women, poisonous environmental pollution, and waste of human and natural resources, none of which can be consistently eliminated without the socialist transformation of society.
 2. That transformation cannot be begun without the violent, revolutionary overthrow of the existing bourgeois state. Such revolutions will take place in different countries at different times, depending on the conditions in each.
 3. For any socialist revolution to succeed, the proletariat must be its leading force. In general the industrial proletariat is the most advanced section of the working class.
 4. But the proletariat must lead a broad united front of the revolutionary sections of all classes and strata whose interests are antagonistic to those of the bourgeoisie (monopoly *and* non-monopoly).
 5. The proletariat must be led by its own vanguard detachment, organized into a Leninist party (with such adaptations as conditions

require). There should be a single party for men and women of all nationalities.

6. The victorious proletariat must exercise state power in the form of its revolutionary dictatorship, to consolidate socialism and pursue the gradual development of classless communist society. The general tasks of this dictatorship are

abolishing all the exploiting classes, developing socialist economy to the maximum, enhancing the communist consciousness of the masses, abolishing the differences between ownership by the whole people and collective ownership, between workers and peasants, between town and country and between mental and manual labourers, . . . [abolishing inequality between nationalities and between the sexes,] eliminating any possibility of the re-emergence of classes and the restoration of capitalism and providing conditions for the realization of a communist society. . . preventing attacks by international imperialism (including armed intervention and disintegration by peaceful means) and . . . giving support to the world revolution. . .¹

7. The party must apply the mass line, taking the separate and scattered knowledge of the masses about their own needs, the reality in which they live, and ways of changing that reality; summing up this knowledge in light of Marxism-Leninism and historical experience, and taking this higher level of knowledge back to the people.
 8. The party must apply criticism/self-criticism, including soliciting criticism from the masses.
 9. The democratic demands for which the party fights must include full equality among all nationalities and between the sexes, including those forms of special assistance needed to help create *real* equality. This applies not only to society at large, but to the party and its organizations.
 10. The proletariat stands for the voluntary union of nations and peoples, which is impossible without the right of every nation contained within the borders of a larger state, and of every colony, to self-determination, i.e., the right to form a separate nation-state.
 11. The chief internationalist duty of the proletariat in every capitalist country is to overthrow its own bourgeoisie and thus weaken the worldwide system of imperialism. The proletariat must also support other proletarian revolutionary movements, as well as all genuine national liberation movements, i.e., those that will carry the struggle for independence and development to a higher stage.
 12. The struggle against imperialism cannot be waged without a consistent struggle against opportunism, both right and "left."
- B. Because of the strong influence of various forms of opportunism in this country, communists disagree on the application of many of these principles. Many such disagreements exist within our party-building

¹Editorial Departments of *Renmin Ribao* and *Hongqi*, *On Khrushchov's Phoney Communism and its Historical Lessons for the World: Comment on the Open Letter of the Central Committee of the CPSU (IX)* (FLP: Peking, 1964), pp. 12-13. The words in brackets are not a paraphrase of the text, but our own addition.

organization, but for it to function properly we must limit its members to those who can at least accept scarcely-disputable facts, and the implications of those facts. In particular, we all recognize these points:

1. The Soviet Union has been ruled for a long time by revisionists, who in practice oppose the tasks of the dictatorship of the proletariat listed above. Internally the revisionists exploit and oppress the people of the USSR, and externally they play a counter-revolutionary role on a wide scale.²

We do not agree on whether its economic system remains socialist or whether a form of capitalism has been restored, on whether or not the country is an imperialist superpower, or on whether or not a significant part of its international role is progressive.

2. We have no unified position on whether the present leadership in China is revisionist. We are all at least open to the possibility that it is.
3. Neither current nor immediately foreseeable conditions justify a tactical alliance by the U.S. proletariat with the U.S. bourgeoisie; no conditions would justify a strategic alliance. Agitating for imperialist war preparations, in the form of opposition to "appeasing the USSR," is only consistent with such an alliance.

We do not agree on whether the Theory of Three Worlds, correctly applied, is Marxist-Leninist or revisionist.

4. The disagreements stated above are important not only because they will affect communist propaganda and agitation on important events, but because they reflect ideological differences that will lead to disagreement on other major questions. Our differences can coexist in this network now, but one of our tasks is to resolve them expeditiously.

II. The purpose of this organization is to build a new communist party. We agree on the following line to guide this work.

- A. In the U.S. there is neither a consistent Marxist-Leninist party, nor one sufficiently open to criticism of its opportunism that communists should focus their party-building efforts on uniting with it. [*Excludes those in basic unity with existing parties.*³]
- B. To create the conditions for formation of such a party, Marxist-Leninists who agree with these points of unity should join a nationwide pre-party organization, a network of local circles. [*Excludes the "expanding-local-circle" view of party-building, and the line that communists can only build unity through direct joint practice.*]

²We think comrades who believe that the USSR has a progressive side to its international role should recognize the truth of this statement, knowing as they do that the Soviets have opposed or openly betrayed several national liberation struggles, occupied Eastern Europe, and supported a worldwide system of revisionist parties.

³We determined these points by listing the aims and methods of a pre-party organization, not by thinking about particular forces that should be excluded. However, since some comrades mistakenly think that unity on party-building is so vague and broad so as to admit almost everyone, without changes in their lines, we have inserted statements of the lines that would be excluded with the level of unity we propose.

C. Though a party is best suited for organizing theoretical work and ideological struggle, the pre-party organization must:

1. Define the questions which a party program must answer; identify those that are unanswered or controversial among us; organize the study and the struggle to answer those questions, including concrete investigations of the particular status and outlook of the various classes, the different nationalities, and women.
2. Study and write about the political economy of the U.S., the state, the trade unions, and other major institutions of bourgeois society, both to provide a tactical orientation for the working-class struggle and to provide material for communist propaganda and agitation.
3. Organize study and struggle over the nature and functioning of the party we seek to build, including norms for the operation of democratic centralism.
4. Take up these theoretical projects in the order of their importance, first using the two criteria of value for settling controversial programmatic questions and value for our practical work in the proletariat, passing to a focus on questions of party organization as the time for forming a party grows closer.

[Excludes the line of postponing most theoretical work until we have a party, and line that we are well grounded theoretically.]

D. The developing U.S. workers' movement and the spread of communism among radical intellectuals and other petty bourgeois have taken place separately, and the two movements remain largely separate. We must work for their fusion into a communist working-class movement. *[Excludes "fusion is at a high level" and equating petty bourgeois communists in the factories with communist workers.]*

E. Though a party is best suited for all forms of mass work, the pre-party organization must take up the following practical tasks in order to begin the building of a party that will eventually be proletarian in composition and will lead the working-class movement, to ground our theory in reality, to provide some assistance to the people's struggles against the attacks of capital and the drive towards war, to assist in the remolding of our own outlooks, and to further the struggle for communist unity:

1. Provide practical leadership to popular resistance to the capitalists and their state, especially the struggles of the industrial proletariat and of oppressed nationalities. *[Excludes disdain for people's day-to-day struggles. Excludes, while fusion is low, focus on liberation support coalitions or various struggles that attract mainly the petty bourgeoisie.]*
2. In the course of providing that leadership, use agitation to raise the workers' understanding of how the problems they face are rooted in the class contradictions of capitalism, and their grasp of the role of the bourgeois state. *[Excludes "propaganda as chief form of work," and fusion as immersion in the class struggle at its existing level.]*
3. Work with the most progressive and active workers who come forward in these struggles, so as to jointly provide leadership to the struggle (both training these workers and learning from them), to do propaganda work to raise their political level, and, where possible,

to win them to communism and our organizations. [*Excludes inattention to development of a vanguard detachment of the working class.*]

4. The *main* purposes of our mass work before we have a party that is in fact a proletarian vanguard party are to assist the development of a working-class vanguard (of advanced and intermediate workers), to win that vanguard to communism, and to carry out investigations required for our theoretical work. [*Excludes line of simply recruiting an existing vanguard, and line that fails to distinguish between practice in a period of party-building and practice when the party can really lead the mass movement.*]

[*E.1-E.4 also exclude postponing significant mass work until communists, or party-building forces, either unite on political line or accomplish a large part of our theoretical work.*]

5. There are few advanced workers, as Lenin defined them, in the U.S. today, nor even a substantial number of intermediates (active agitators and organizers who believe in socialism). We must learn how to do communist work in these conditions, and we must learn how to describe politically significant strata as they exist in the class today.

F. Other functions of the pre-party network

1. Exchange lessons from each others' practice systematically, and permit evaluation of each others' practice.
2. Arrange necessary travel and conferences, to broaden our knowledge and conduct struggle over differences
3. Follow developments in other parties and organizations in the movement, and arm those in common practice with other forces with an understanding of their lines

G. Network organization [*Details depend on number and attributes of forces participating*]

1. An elected steering committee must survey our forces; organize security; establish communications, reports, and publications; identify programmatic and major tactical questions and decide priorities for study and struggle over them; make assignments to bodies doing theoretical work (ensuring that existing different lines are represented); organize monitoring of the communist press; prepare conferences. The steering committee may not answer, for the organization, important questions that are still controversial within it.
2. Participating groups may struggle within the steering committee for their views on questions within the committee's authority. On matters fundamentally affecting the work of the network, member groups may also take their disagreements to the entire network.
3. Each group commits itself to having its entire membership study and discuss the different positions when there is struggle within the network over political line or other key questions.
4. [*Specify role of independents.*]
5. [*State, generally, local groups' expected commitment of human and financial resources to the work of the network.*]

6. Repeated deviations from principled methods of struggle are grounds for expulsion from the network. [*Specify required vote of members.*]

[*F. and G. exclude anarchic, localist, spontaneous party-building.*]

- H. Among our theoretical, practical, and organizational tasks, the theoretical are primary. In other words, the acute absence of developed, correct, and widely-accepted theory is the greatest obstacle to our work. But neglect of practice or the work of organizing our own forces would cause intolerable harm to party-building. [*Excludes "party-building is fusion," line of organize first without clear unity, and one-sided insistence on theoretical work only.*]
- I. A geographically dispersed, democratic-centralist organization like the former "pre-parties" in this country is a party. We should form a party when, and only when, all of us who can agree on a correct program and a common conception of how the party should function do so agree, and when we can choose leaders whose practice has prove their fitness for the responsibilities of leadership. [*Excludes premature party-formation, i.e., without meeting preconditions, and unnecessary preconditions of uniting most Marxist-Leninists, specified levels of fusion, and more theory than that required for program and principles of party organization.*]
- J. Meeting the preconditions for use of the democratic-centralist party form does not at all guarantee that we will immediately have sufficient advanced theory, the unity of most or all communists, and an organization which truly unites the vanguard detachment of the working class. We will use our higher level of organization to struggle to meet these requirements for a strong and effective party. [*Excludes specifying unnecessary preconditions, and assumptions that party-formation automatically means that we have the theory we need, that fusion is at a high level, or that we are the only real communists in the country.*]
- K. The main deviation in party-building in the U.S. has been "left," in rushing to form parties before any of the preconditions were met, in extreme sectarianism towards other communists, in petty-bourgeois communists' attempts to present themselves as a working-class vanguard, and in refusal to take the time to do absolutely essential theoretical work. The failure of other forces to take up party-building has generally been a consequence of rightist lack of initiative and contentment with primitive, local forms of work. [*Note: We provide a skeletal statement of the deviations here, but the unity statement of a pre-party network should contain a more developed critique.*]



\$3.50

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